

**FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES  
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Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1964-67**

**Department of State  
Washington, DC**

/4/Text of the statement, which President Kennedy made at a news conference on May 8, 1963, is printed in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963*, p. 373.

/5/Reference is to a letter from Kennedy given to Eshkol on October 3, 1963; for text, see *Foreign Relations, 1961-1963*, vol. XVIII, Document 332.

Israel has presented a sizeable request for military assistance. On the list in 1963 were a public security guarantee, secret contingency planning, naval equipment, surface-to-surface missiles, grant-aid United States tanks (300 now, 200 later), etc. Our November exchanges with the Israelis indicated that these requests are out of line with Israel's actual military needs.

*Israel needs* gradual modernization of its tank and anti-tank defenses. In other respects it has a healthy margin of superiority for some years to come. The UAR's showcase missiles are in fact only that, not a military threat, and will probably remain so unless Israel gets into serious missilery and the UAR then turns to the Soviets for help. The UAR missiles point up, however, the domestic psychological problem Israel's leaders face.

The Israelis and others have made efforts to downgrade our capability and commitment to defend Israel. Without going so far toward Israel that we break the bond of confidence we have developed with the Arabs and risk creating a vastly dangerous USSR/Arab versus United States/Israel lineup, we can lay more effective emphasis on what we have very generously done and are doing to help. And there are certain new moves we can make in 1964 that will please Israel and help meet its domestic political problem (and ours). Details of both are in the second enclosure.

In addition, however, we need to work at measures to curb the arms race and enhance stability. To that end:

a) We should continue active exploration of arms limitation and control. Secretary Rusk has spoken to Foreign Minister Gromyko about the possibility of mutual restraint in the disposition of obsolete weapons. Our Ambassador in Cairo has begun to probe his Soviet colleague on aspects of arms control in the area. We have talked to Nasser secretly about the United States becoming a kind of guarantor for working arrangements to control the escalation of arms. There is discussion of arms control, as well as nuclear free zone possibilities, in the United Nations context. From all of these not much has opened up so far, but the time might come when we could do something serious with the Russians about restraint. Our capability to deal with all parties in this field is enhanced by our traditional Near East arms policy.

b) We should make clear on appropriate public occasions that we will defend the independence of all Near East states and will resist aggression in any form.

c) If we facilitate solution of Israel's tank problem, we should get assurance in return that Israel will not plunge the Near East into either the sophisticated missile or the nuclear weapons field.

*Arab Refugees:* 1964 will be the year of turn-around on this problem. President Kennedy's talk with Ben-Gurion in May 1961/<sup>6</sup> and letters to Arab leaders launched a major initiative designed, if successful, to eliminate, over several years, this problem that bulks so large in the Arab-Israel dilemma.<sup>7</sup> Negotiations over the next several months will show whether this can proceed fruitfully.

<sup>6</sup>For a memorandum of Kennedy's meeting with Ben Gurion on May 30, 1961, see *ibid.*, vol. XVII, Document 57.

<sup>7</sup>United States supported the 1961 appointment of a Special Representative of the UN Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC) to conduct indirect negotiations between Israel and the Arab states toward a resolution of the Palestinian refugee question. After meeting with Arab and Israeli leaders, Special Representative Joseph E. Johnson submitted his proposals to the PCC on August 31, 1962. For an August 7, 1962, memorandum from Rusk to Kennedy summarizing the background of the initiative and Johnson's proposals, see *ibid.*, vol. XVIII, Document 15. Extensive documentation concerning the initiative is *ibid.*, volumes XVII and XVIII.

The chances, frankly, are not good. Neither the Arabs nor Israel accepted Dr. Joseph Johnson's proposals, and Israel's public rejection of any settlement based on existing United Nations resolutions has further compounded the problem. If we fail, we could probably buy time by continuing to support UNRWA indefinitely (an unpopular course in Congress), or perhaps could phase it out gradually over a period of years. We must expect, however, a storm in the United Nations should the Arabs read this as our goal. We have already tightened UNRWA's belt. The climax will come next fall when the General Assembly must determine UNRWA's future.

Whatever the outcome, a heavy investment of United States influence will be required if area stability is to be preserved over this important issue.

*Oil:* From the oil producing countries (organized through OPEC) we now face the most intensive pressures for major concession revisions that have ever been put forward. Our influence will be needed on all sides to help maintain the rapport and trust needed between the companies and governments to prevent changes that would entail either chaos or injury to United States private investment in this vital sector. The threat of Arab sanctions against Western oil interests in reaction to Israel's diversion of Jordan waters may not materialize but is another aspect showing the context in which our interests in the Near East must be viewed.

*Intra-Arab Relations:* Arab actions on these five problems will be shaped by the state of their own relations. Divided and quarreling as they are today, Arab politicians find a hard line against Israel inescapable. This increases the risk of irrational explosion on any of the big problems.

Without the UAR, no Arab state or combination of states could really damage Israel. Knowing this, other states--most actively, Syria--seek to embroil the UAR with Israel on, for example, Jordan waters and Palestine refugees. A major object of our policy toward the UAR is to persuade Nasser that he is wise to keep Israeli issues "in the icebox," as his Ambassador says. Similarly, our purpose in Yemen is to prevent a conflagration that might involve other Arab states and ultimately Israel.

In intra-Arab tensions, as in other problems cited here, the key is balance and a careful husbanding of limited and hard-won U.S. influence.