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# Politics and Pragmatism: The United States and Israel Between Two Presidents

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POLITICS AND PRAGMATISM: THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL BETWEEN TWO  
PRESIDENTS

by

CHRISTOPHER PARKER

(Under the Direction of William Allison)

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the United States' relationship with Israel and the wider Middle East between the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. The United States' relationship with Israel has reverberated across the Middle East and studying its impact is critical for understanding past and present issues in the region. It begins with an examination of the factors that impelled President Truman to act against the advice of his Department of State and recognize Israel only minutes after it declared statehood in May 1948; arguing that, above all else, domestic political considerations lay at the heart of his decision. It then assesses the impact of this decision on the Eisenhower administration's efforts to develop a coherent Cold War foreign policy in the region. Here, it charts the evolution of a policy constructed around the belief that the United States' relationship with Israel risked driving the resource rich Arab states into the arms of the Soviet Union. This concern grew from perception to reality between 1953 and 1956, resulting in a significant expenditure of diplomatic energy and foreign aid to combat perceived Soviet advances in the Middle East. In the end, it posits that President Truman's decision to recognize Israel ran counter to the United States' Cold War objectives, thereby indicating a conflict of interests in U.S. foreign policy.

INDEX WORDS: Truman, Eisenhower, Cold War, Middle East.

POLITICS AND PRAGMATISM: THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL BETWEEN TWO  
PRESIDENTS

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MASTER OF ARTS

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## INTRODUCTION

Supporting the extreme objectives of political Zionism [would be] to the detriment of overall U.S. security objectives.<sup>1</sup>

George F. Kennan  
Director of Policy Planning  
U.S. Department of State, 1947-1949

On March 3, 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed a joint meeting of the United States Congress. On the surface this was far from an extraordinary event; more Israeli heads of state have addressed joint meetings of congress than any other foreign nation.<sup>2</sup> However, the circumstances surrounding Netanyahu's speech, and the purpose of it, proved unprecedented. Netanyahu was not invited by President Barack Obama to address congress, nor was the President consulted about his visit beforehand.<sup>3</sup> Even more striking was the purpose behind his speech. Netanyahu sought to use the United States Congress to undermine the President's foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, he was attempting to stop the United States from negotiating an end to Iranian economic sanctions in exchange for that country halting its nuclear program. David Axelrod, Senior Advisor to the President from 2009 to 2011, remarked that it was "extraordinary for a foreign leader to try and use congress to undermine U.S. foreign policy," describing the move as "audacious."<sup>5</sup> Separately, Speaker of the House John Boehner, who invited Netanyahu to speak to congress, received a standing ovation from the Republican

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 51.

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Historian, United States House of Representatives, "Foreign Leaders and Dignitaries who have Addressed the U.S. Congress," accessed January 23, 2015, <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Foreign-Leaders/Fast-Facts/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Frontline*, season 34, episode 1, "Netanyahu at War," Produced by Michael Kirk, aired January 5, 2016, on PBS.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



caucus for standing up to the White House.<sup>6</sup> David Remnick of *The New Yorker* described President Obama as “furious, this is an absolute humiliation for him in the midst of a very delicate negotiation with Iran.”<sup>7</sup>

Although it may have escalated to a new level, this most recent tension points to an underlying conflict that has been present since the beginning of America’s relationship with Israel. Specifically, it stands as a revealing footnote to a foreign policy that was forever altered when President Truman made the controversial decision to disregard his State Department’s counsel and recognize Israel only minutes after it declared statehood in 1948. The scope and purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to examine the initial disputes between President Truman and his advisors to determine why he acted against the State Department’s guidance and then, later, assess how this decision affected President Eisenhower’s efforts in the region. This is a relational study that seeks to shed light on the impact that one president’s policy choices had on those of his successor. It does not attempt to assess the efficacy of the foreign policy promulgated by either president; it simply examines the motives behind each administration’s respective approaches to the Middle East and posits basic conclusions about how these approaches aligned with the nation’s Cold War interests.

To accomplish this, it is important to start by dissecting the various currents surrounding Truman’s decision to recognize Israel. This was a historically notable act, laden with ramifications that lasted well beyond Truman’s tenure in the White House. As such, it also reveals a great deal about the President and the forces weighing on him at the time, and it is

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<sup>6</sup> Frank Bruni, “Christians Loving Jews,” *The New York Times*, March 7, 2015, accessed January 21, 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/08/opinion/sunday/frank-bruni-benjamin-netanyahu-john-boehner-and-americas-evangelicals.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/08/opinion/sunday/frank-bruni-benjamin-netanyahu-john-boehner-and-americas-evangelicals.html?_r=0).

<sup>7</sup> *Frontline*, “Netanyahu at War.”

imperative that proper emphasis be assigned to the circumstances that drove Truman to align the United States with Israel. This critical first step has yielded diverging verdicts by well-respected historians across the field. Some historians, such as Peter Hahn, have argued that this episode was one of the earliest examples of Christian Zionism influencing politics.<sup>8</sup> Others, like Steven Spiegel, emphasize the role of the Zionist lobby and the internal discord between the White House and the State Department while playing down the role of domestic politics.<sup>9</sup> Assigning the proper weight to these motives provides the context necessary to properly assess Truman's decision and this is the focus of Chapter One.

Chapter One explores the motives that drove President Truman to defy his Secretary of State and recognize Israel. It posits that Truman's decision was motivated by a combination of pressures from the Zionist lobby, post-Holocaust sympathy towards European Jews, the nascent pangs of a burgeoning Cold War, and, most importantly, election year politics.<sup>10</sup> While each of these factors influenced Truman, the issue of Israel in the 1948 presidential election presents the most tangible evidence for his decision. Not only was support for Israel an important part of Truman's campaign strategy but, the president's repudiation of the U.N. sponsored Bernadotte Plan on the eve of the election goes far in revealing the political relevance of the issue to the president's reelection efforts.<sup>11</sup> President Truman's position on Israel may have helped him win

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<sup>8</sup> Peter L. Hahn, *United States – Middle East Relations* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 42.

<sup>9</sup> Steven L. Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 49.

<sup>10</sup> Memorandum Supporting a Statement by Truman Recognizing Israel, May 9, 1948, Clifford Papers, Subject File, Box 14, Correspondence, Miscellaneous, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO; Edward Stettinius to Harry S. Truman, April 18, 1945, Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files, Foreign Affairs File, Box 161, Palestine - 1945-1947, Truman Library.

<sup>11</sup> Memorandum, Clark Clifford to Harry S. Truman, November 19, 1947, Clifford Papers, Political File, Box 22, Confidential Memo to the President [Clifford-Rowe Memorandum],

the election but, it certainly did not help the Eisenhower administration navigate the complexities of Middle East diplomacy in the face of an expanding Soviet threat and, less than a decade later, the repercussions of Truman's decision become strikingly apparent.

Chapter Two brings to life the key players, events, and pacts that colored the diplomatic landscape when Eisenhower entered office in 1953. It was a world still reeling from the turbulence caused by the Second World War. New leaders, like Nikita Khrushchev and Gamal Abdel Nasser, collided with older, more established ones, like Dwight Eisenhower and David Ben-Gurion, in the contest for influence that came to characterize the Cold War. The traditional European powers, England and France, found themselves in dire straits as they struggled to maintain control of their colonial possessions, often resorting to increasingly violent means of subduing subjects desperate for political self-determination and freedom. A resurgent Russia, liberated from the constraints of Stalinism, adopted a flexible foreign policy bent on engaging with the emerging Third World. This presented a new set of challenges for the West and nations like England, France, and the United States responded through a combination of multilateral agreements they hoped would rebuff Soviet expansion. These persons and events formed the backdrop against which the Eisenhower administration attempted to craft a coherent Middle East policy and this chapter surveys the complex diplomatic terrain they were forced to navigate.

Finally, Chapter Three examines how Truman's successor worked tirelessly to chart a new foreign policy in the Middle East. President Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, recognized the critical importance of Middle East oil and believed that the United States' association with Israel threatened to deliver the region and its resources to the Soviet

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Truman Library; Harry S. Truman, "Statement by the President on Israel," October 24, 1948, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed March 19, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=13065&st=Dewey&st1=Israel>.

Union.<sup>12</sup> Eisenhower and Dulles' concerns escalated from perception to reality in the span of three years as the 1955 Soviet-Egyptian arms deal, the nationalization of the Suez Canal, and the ensuing Suez Crisis led them to believe that their problem was far greater than a lack of prestige. Identifying the source of this issue as America's relationship with Israel, the administration launched two increasingly ambitious projects to foster peace in the region: 1953's Jordan Valley Project (JVP) and 1955's Operation Alpha. However, after years of failed attempts and apparent Soviet progress, Eisenhower and Dulles scuttled their programs and offered aid to Arab nations without conditioning it on a settlement with Israel. This policy, which came to be known as the Eisenhower Doctrine, diverted an additional \$200,000,000 over the course of 1958 and 1959 to Middle East nations under threat from Communism.<sup>13</sup> Although greater monetary inducements were offered under the JVP and Operation Alpha, the Eisenhower Doctrine proved to be the most costly of the three as the aid it delivered failed to purchase the peace so long desired by Eisenhower. Instead, it serves as a testament to the administration's desperate attempt to garner sway over Arab nations upset by America's perceived closeness with Israel.

Over the course of his first term in office, Eisenhower initiated a policy that relied on increasing amounts of U.S. fiscal aid to counterbalance the divisive and unpopular support for Israel that threatened to drive the Arabs and their oil into the arms of the Soviet Union. In the

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<sup>12</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between John Foster Dulles, Senator Walter F. George, and Douglas MacArthur II, March 30, 1956, John Foster Dulles Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (2), Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, KS; Memorandum of Conversation between John Foster Dulles and Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, November 16, 1956, John Foster Dulles Papers, 1951-1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memos of Conversation – General J Through K (1), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>13</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, "U.S. Role in the Middle East," address to the U.S. Congress, January 5, 1957, Council on Foreign Relations, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.cfr.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/president-eisenhowers-speech-us-role-middle-east-eisenhower-doctrine-1957/p24130>.

end, I posit that balancing America's relationship with Israel against greater U.S. interests in the region prompted the administration to devote large sums of diplomatic energy and economic aid to support its entrenched ally and appease its disgruntled neighbors, thereby indicating a conflict of interest. When the two administration's policies are compared, it becomes apparent that President Truman's decision, heavily influenced by domestic politics, set the United States on a collision course with its Cold War objectives in the Middle East. Frustrated by their repeated failure to win over the Arabs, Dulles pointed the finger at the previous administration's embrace of Israel as spoiling the U.S. presence in the region and, try as they did, he and Eisenhower were never able to completely undo the damage caused by this.<sup>14</sup> However, before detailing these developments, it is first necessary to define key terms and concepts used in throughout this work.

There are three terms presented hereafter that require clarification; two are relatively simple and straightforward: Zionism and Palestine. The third, U.S. Cold War interests, is much more complex and requires a detailed description to appropriately frame the argument that revolves around it. Historian Peter Hahn defines Zionism as "A political ideology favoring the return of the Jewish people from their worldwide diaspora to their ancient homeland in Palestine and the establishment of a political state there."<sup>15</sup> This definition is widely accepted and more than suffices for this thesis. The Zionist lobby, then, are those acting through political channels to influence policy in favor of this aim. Palestine refers to the territory running along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, bordered to the north by Lebanon, in the south by the Sinai Peninsula (Egypt), and in the east by Syria and Jordan. In this work, the term Palestine is used to

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<sup>14</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation with the Secretary of State, October 18, 1955, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, vol. 14, *Arab-Israeli Dispute 1955*, ed. John P. Glennon and Carl N. Raether (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 612-613.

<sup>15</sup> Hahn, *United States – Middle East Relations*, 171.

reference this area prior to Israel's declaration of statehood in May 1948 and, after that event, the term Israel is used to reference the same area. However, it must be noted that, although Israel controlled most of this territory upon the cessation of hostilities during the 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli War, two Arab enclaves remained within Israel, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which were administered by Egypt and Jordan respectively.<sup>16</sup>

To demonstrate that President Truman's decision to recognize Israel conflicted with greater U.S. interests, it is important to accurately define what those interests were and how the United States planned on triumphing in the signature conflict of the twentieth century. To do this, it is necessary to discern the nation's core interests from the means it employed to achieve or protect those interests (policy). That U.S. interests are often couched in the altruistic trappings of a foreign policy bent on promoting liberal values abroad can make it difficult to identify the core interests at stake behind the policy. In other words, assuming U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War was driven by a desire to promote freedom and democracy out of good natured benevolence fails to recognize the true intent behind those actions. Failing to separate the interests from the policy rhetoric that cloaks it, is akin to missing the forest for the trees.

With World War II upending the pre-war power structure, the United States emerged from the conflict a preeminent world power, albeit sharing this title with the Soviet Union. The tense relationship between these two nations characterized the next half-century of foreign relations and gave the United States a very real stake in executing a pragmatic foreign policy in support of its own best interests, not simply an idealistic approach rooted in core values. Russia's desire to foment world revolution and spread Communism stood at odds with American efforts

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<sup>16</sup> United Nations, *The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem, 1917-1988*, (New York: UN, 1978), accessed February 26, 2016, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/5ba47a5c6cef541b802563e000493b8c/aeac80e740c782e4852561150071fdb0?OpenDocument>.

to foster democracy and played a critical part in shaping U.S. foreign policy. As described by George F. Kennan, the former *charge d'affaires* in Moscow, the Soviet Union aimed to “make sure that it has filled every nook and cranny available to it in the basin of world power [and] the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.”<sup>17</sup> Although Kennan may have exaggerated Soviet objectives with a bit of hyperbole, his assessment and recommendation accurately reflected the general consensus among American diplomats and politicians of the era. Soviet aims were seen as a very real threat to American interests around the world and a comprehensive foreign policy was needed to contain them.

Foundational documents, such as National Security Council (NSC) 20/4, described the threat posed by Soviet Communism and detailed both U.S. domestic and foreign policy aims for edging out the Russian menace. Three of the objectives outlined in NSC 20/4 shed light on the U.S. strategy for containing the Soviet Union at the dawn of the Cold War. First, this keystone document noted the importance of maximizing “our economic potential.”<sup>18</sup> To do this, the United States required overseas markets to sell its manufactured products, for no economy is robust in isolation, and America sought like-minded trading partners to expand its economic base. This meant that key trading partners in Europe required access to raw materials, like oil, to

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<sup>17</sup> “X” [George F. Kennan], “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947): 566-582, accessed February 23, 2017, <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.libez.lib.georgiasouthern.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=8797843f-33c7-4043-a220-56246e54b928%40sessionmgr4007&hid=4202>.

<sup>18</sup> Report by the National Security Council on U.S. Objectives with Respect to the USSR to Counter Soviet Threats to U.S. Security (NSC 20/4), November 23, 1948, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948, vol. 1, part 2, *General; the United Nations (in two parts)* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 663-669.

drive their economic engines and fuel their NATO pact militaries. Promoting democracy and capitalism the world over was deemed the best method of accomplishing this.

Next, and most importantly, NSC 20/4 described the need to “strengthen the orientation toward the United States of the non-Soviet nations.”<sup>19</sup> This meant building economic and political ties with Third World nations so that they would have a vested interest in supporting U.S. objectives and could act as surrogates, projecting U.S. influence in their respective region. Finally, NSC 20/4 identified the need to strain the relationship between Moscow and its satellites; disrupting Soviet plans and alliances was deemed vital to U.S. interests as it would allow America to exploit tension in the Soviet sphere of influence and potentially block further expansion.<sup>20</sup> To accomplish these objectives, diplomats like Kennan constructed the American Cold War policy of containment which sought to achieve hegemony by “methods short of war” through garnering influence over non-aligned nations while simultaneously degrading Soviet leverage and prestige.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to its static connotation, containment was characterized by a dynamic struggle between East and West with countervailing forces constantly at play. To identify areas where containment policy was most needed, U.S. diplomats often identified nations plagued by political or economic instability as the most at risk for Soviet exploitation.<sup>22</sup> This led to what Historian John L. Gaddis labeled the Cold War “hydraulic theory.” Gaddis suggested that pressure applied

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<sup>19</sup> Report by the National Security Council on U.S. Objectives with Respect to the USSR to Counter Soviet Threats to U.S. Security (NSC 20/4), November 23, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 1:663-669.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between John Foster Dulles and Prime Minister Naguib, U.S. Embassy in Cairo, May 11, 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 1, *The Near and Middle East (in two parts)*, ed. John P. Glennon, Paul Claussen, Joan M. Lee, and Carl N. Raether (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), 8-18.



through containment had to be vented somewhere, and regions wracked with economic or political instability often proved the most susceptible to Soviet collusion.<sup>23</sup> Aptly describing the hydraulic theory in action, a 1952 State Department memorandum characterized the Middle East as, "...the general picture appears to be one of such continuing weakness as to constitute an invitation to a shift in the theater of primary pressure if further Communist progress were to be successfully blocked in other areas."<sup>24</sup>

The ultimate "Cold War hydraulicist," John Foster Dulles described the hydraulic theory of containment to French Prime Minister Pineau in more colorful terms. "Communism was like gas compressed in a bottle," declared Dulles, "If not hermetically sealed, it escapes, spreads and poisons the environment."<sup>25</sup> In this light, U.S. efforts in Korea and Europe appeared to have hemmed in the Soviet bear; however, the instable and recently decolonized underbelly of the Eurasian continent presented a containment soft-spot in the minds of many U.S. diplomats. Volatile regions like this drew U.S. attention because instability was fertile soil for Communist revolution and Soviet meddling. This, combined with the area's critical natural resources, gave cause for the Eisenhower administration to redouble their investment in the Middle East in an attempt to shore up the fledgling governments and seal off Communism's southern flank. Bearing the implications of Truman's decision to align with Israel, this would prove easier said than done. In addition to primary source analysis, several political scientists and historians have

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<sup>23</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 168-169.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum Prepared by the Policy Planning Staff, May 21, 1952, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:232-234.

<sup>25</sup> Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez: Eisenhower Takes America into the Middle East* (New York: The Linden Press, 1981), 201.

contributed significantly to a better understanding of American Cold War objectives and foreign policy interests.

John L. Gaddis combined the values laden rhetoric of the Truman and Eisenhower Doctrines with the objectives outlined above to adroitly describe U.S. foreign policy interests at the mid-century mark. “[The United States] certainly did seek the emergence of independent centers of power in the postwar world: that was how containment was supposed to work,” Gaddis argued, “They certainly sought, at the same time, to integrate those centers economically, politically, and culturally...”<sup>26</sup> From this, U.S. interests become even more clear; the United States sought to frustrate Soviet expansion by supporting independent states that were economically integrated in a global capitalist marketplace and politically aligned with the United States. Historian Thomas J. McCormick elaborated on this understanding with his “world systems theory.” McCormick argued that American foreign policy was driven by economic considerations and structured to provide the best advantage to the American economy in the global marketplace.<sup>27</sup> With the economy serving as the lynchpin of a strong national defense, this framework can also be seen as beneficial from a national security perspective.

Taking key aspects from primary documents like NSC 20/4 and combining them with analysis from historians like Gaddis and McCormick, makes defining American Cold War interests much easier. It can therefore be stated that U.S. foreign policy during the era sought influence over non-aligned nations that, once integrated into a capitalist marketplace, would be inclined to support U.S. objectives and security aims in the face of Communist pressure. In the

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<sup>26</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 203.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), quoted in Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations*, vol. 2, *Since 1914*, 6th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 4.

Middle East, this meant not only stopping Soviet political and economic advances, but also ensuring that stable and friendly Arab governments kept the oil flowing into western markets. While this analysis describes U.S. Cold War interests, it does so without drawing on the testimony of Presidents Truman or Eisenhower and, therefore, it will be necessary to explore how these two interpreted U.S. interests and translated them into action on the international stage. Having defined U.S. Cold War interests, it is now possible to explore why Truman acted against his State Department's guidance and how the conflict of interests this generated was evidenced through the Suez Crisis and the Eisenhower Doctrine.

## CHAPTER 1

## PRESIDENT HARRY S. TRUMAN

Jesus Christ couldn't please them when he was here on earth, so how could anyone expect that I would have any luck?<sup>28</sup>

Harry S. Truman  
33<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States

When President Truman unexpectedly entered office on April 12, 1945, the question of a Jewish state in Palestine ranked, at best, as a mere footnote at the bottom of a long list of much more pressing priorities and, at worst, was viewed as an insignificant nuisance.<sup>29</sup> This is quite understandable given the historical context of the era. A review of an August 16, 1945 press conference supports this understanding and outlines the President's early position on the possibility of a Jewish state. The topics discussed during the conference highlight the formidable issues he faced as he attempted to guide the nation through the transition from global war to tenuous peace. The President was preoccupied with rebuilding and stabilizing Europe via the European Recovery Program (ERP), finalizing surrender terms with the Japanese, and then working to stabilize that region. Domestically, he was pressed by issues like the continuation of the draft, the fate of the War Labor Board, and the necessity to fill a supreme court vacancy.<sup>30</sup> When asked about the situation in Palestine, Truman expressed his support for Jewish immigration but deferred the subject of statehood to "the British and the Arabs," stating that he

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<sup>28</sup> Michael T. Benson, *Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 93.

<sup>29</sup> Dennis Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 16.

<sup>30</sup> Harry S. Truman, "The President's News Conference," August 16, 1945, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed February 19, 2016, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12389](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12389).

had “no desire to send 500,000 American soldiers there to make peace in Palestine.”<sup>31</sup> These reservations were understandable and generally aligned with the guidance the President was receiving from his advisors at the time. However, as affairs settled in Europe and the Pacific, several currents coalesced to impel the Jewish issue farther up the totem pole of presidential priorities.

### *Context*

After enduring countless assurances and patiently protesting for years, by 1948 Zionist leaders in Palestine, the United States, and Europe were ready to force the issue of a Jewish state. That’s not to say their hard work up to that point had not advanced their cause. Several key events leading up to May 1948 marked important milestones on the path to Jewish statehood. Interestingly, two of the most important steps toward statehood came on the heels of major European conflict and the restructuring of world power and, for context, these deserve brief recognition. The first of these came on November 2, 1917, in the form of a promising letter from British Foreign Secretary James Balfour to Walter Rothschild, a leader in the British Zionist movement. Known as the Balfour Declaration, among other things, it stated, “His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”<sup>32</sup> The declaration was endorsed by President Woodrow Wilson who was sympathetic to the Zionist cause. Although the Balfour Declaration certainly advanced the Zionist cause by lending credibility and legitimate government backing to their effort, it failed to deliver on the promise of a Jewish home as it conflicted with wider British concessions to Arab leaders in the

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<sup>31</sup> Harry S. Truman, “The President’s News Conference,” *The American Presidency Project*, August 16, 1945, accessed February 19, 2016, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12389](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12389).

<sup>32</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 12.

region.<sup>33</sup> It turns out that Britain had also promised Palestinian independence in exchange for Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire during World War I.<sup>34</sup> With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Britain received control over Palestine through a League of Nations mandate and refused to yield to either Palestinian or Jewish cries for independence until after the Second World War.<sup>35</sup>

The second critical milestone on the march towards Jewish statehood came in the wake of World War II. The war played a crucial part in propelling the issue of a Jewish state to the center of the world stage. Several factors made this so. First, the horrors of the Holocaust and the tens of thousands of displaced Jews in Europe amplified moral arguments for the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine. Second, Britain, wracked both literally and financially from the war, lost the ability to administer the ever-contested Palestine and, by the end of the war, was eager to relinquish control. Third, already operating under a League of Nations mandate, the advent of the United Nations in 1945 made it appear to be the ideal body for arbitrating the dispute and then administering a solution in the new territory. In April of 1947 the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was created with the purpose of studying the heated Palestine issue and recommending a solution.<sup>36</sup> UNSCOP posited a partition plan for the territory, dividing it between a Palestinian state and a Jewish state, with Jerusalem as an international zone to be administered by the U.N. After two months of debate and some minor alterations, the United Nations adopted Resolution 181 (II) on November 27, 1947 and Britain turned over the territory on May 14, 1948.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> United Nations, *The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem, 1917-1988*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

The UNSCOP partition plan is largely regarded as the most critical step on the path towards Israeli statehood and it is important that this is recognized. In the analysis that follows, support for the partition plan was largely viewed in the same light as support for Israeli statehood and defining this now will help clarify the arguments presented hereafter. Unfortunately, neither the Palestinians, the Jews, nor the wider Middle East were happy with the terms of the partition plan and conflict soon erupted when Israel defied the partition terms and declared statehood on May 14, 1948. The day after the Israeli declaration it was invaded by Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, marking the start of the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948-1949.<sup>38</sup> Fighting raged until October of 1948 when a delicate truce allowed the badly defeated Arab armies to withdraw from the battlefield. In the midst of this mess came President Truman's recognition of the nascent nation only minutes after Israel declared its statehood.

### *Historiography*

A review of the scholarship surrounding Truman's decision to recognize Israel will provide a frame of reference and a comparative standard upon which to judge the evidence presented thereafter. With context and perspective as their guide, historians and political scientists have attributed varying weight to the factors that induced President Truman to recognize Israel. Pointing to the increasingly favorable comments made by Truman from 1945 to 1948, Peter Hahn describes the President's decision to recognize Israel as "a lineal descendent of his earlier pro-Zionist policies and support for the partition [UN Resolution 181]."<sup>39</sup> Hahn also attributes the influence of ardently pro-Zionist advisor Clark Clifford to persuading Truman to recognize Israel. In his account of Clifford's key discussions, Hahn portrays Clifford as urging

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<sup>38</sup> Peter L. Hahn, *United States – Middle East Relations* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>39</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 51.

the President to quickly recognize Israel to prevent the nation from defecting to the Soviet camp.<sup>40</sup> To round this out, Hahn highlights the importance of the 1948 election as a critical factor in Truman's decision. The notoriously tight race between Truman and Dewey led to pandering by both candidates for the Zionist vote in key states like New York.<sup>41</sup> Hahn also identifies "Christian Zionism" as "an important factor in shaping key diplomatic decisions, including the recognition of Israel in 1948."<sup>42</sup>

However, evidence for this is scant at best. Aside from attempting to connect Truman's personal religious convictions to conciliatory remarks he made to Jewish leaders, there is little support for the idea that he based his decision on the Christian belief that Christ's second coming is predicated on Jews returning to their native homeland. Instead, this was a much more recent phenomenon, reaching its zenith near the end of the twentieth century as Evangelical Christians gained relevance under Presidents Nixon, Reagan, and Bush.<sup>43</sup> Overall, Hahn presents President Truman as sharply divided on the Israel issue; constantly torn between the advice of his White House staff and the conflicting guidance given him by the State Department, but, over time, acquiescing to the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>44</sup> He concludes that not until Israel had proven itself in the first Arab-Israeli War was Truman willing to throw American weight behind his initial decision to recognize the nation. While this assessment echoes the general consensus among many historians, it minimizes factors deemed critical by others.

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<sup>40</sup> Peter L. Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 49.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58.

<sup>42</sup> Peter L. Hahn, *United States – Middle East Relations*, 42.

<sup>43</sup> Ross Douthat, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 69.

<sup>44</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 62-63.



Not disputing the conflicted nature of Truman's stance on the Palestine issue, but pointing to a different source for his ultimate decision, is political scientist Steven Spiegel. In fact, Spiegel places the administration's internal dispute between the White House and the State Department as the key element in Truman's decision. He argues that the conflicting guidance the President received obscured his ability to clearly assess the issue and left him to rely on his values and principles. "Frequently confused by the issue and the supporters of each position and often affected by the people most recently seen, this president tried to follow his own principles. Those advisors, agencies, and groups who appealed to the president in ways consistent with his beliefs most often succeeded."<sup>45</sup> In this light, the responsibility given to Clark Clifford by Peter Hahn is not far off the mark, however, it fails to account for the other "principles" and "groups" at work behind the scenes.

Spiegel points to the impact of the Zionist lobby and Truman's personal empathy for the "plight of the Jews" as elements that tipped the scale in favor of a decision recognizing Israel.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, Spiegel does not go so far as to place Truman decidedly in the pro-Zionist camp until it became clear that the Jewish state was a reality and the State Department had failed to present any viable alternatives. This too is in line with Hahn's assessment, yet the two scholars differ on a critical issue: the role of domestic politics. Here, Spiegel decries claims that Truman was influenced by domestic politics or the 1948 election. Spiegel points out that, "...in early 1948, with pressure mounting, he told a high-ranking figure in the Democratic National Committee that he excluded politics from consideration of the Palestine question..."<sup>47</sup> In sum, Spiegel presents Truman as torn over the question of Jewish statehood and, amidst conflicting

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<sup>45</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 49.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 36.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

guidance from his own administration and increasing pressure from the Zionist lobby, decided to rely on his values and principles to guide his decision on the issue. However, dismissing the power of domestic politics during an election year is an error, and a review of Truman's actions leading up to the election point to the fact that they deserve more credit than Spiegel gives them. In fact, I argue that this was a central factor in pushing the President to decide in favor of Israel. Hahn and Spiegel's dissent over what drove Truman to recognize Israel is indicative of the subject's contentious nature and is symbolic of the wider discord between the White House and the State Department over the issue. While a more detailed analysis of this schism can be found in the section titled "The Cold War," a brief introduction is helpful in setting the stage for the heated debates that follow.

#### *Controversy and Truman's Worldview*

Early evidence from the Truman administration indicates that he and his advisors were aware of the conflict inherent in recognizing Israel and the decision to do so was not taken lightly.<sup>48</sup> The fact that many of President Truman's key counselors, including his Secretary of State and Director of Policy Planning, saw "no strategic value" in Israel made his decision to recognize the new nation that much more interesting.<sup>49</sup> This conflict cannot be understated. All three of the men who served as Secretary of State for Truman prior to his recognition of Israel; Edward Stettinius, James Byrnes, and George Marshall, strongly urged the President to take a different course with regards to the Palestine situation. Of the three, George Marshall's relationship with the President over the situation in Palestine is particularly notable.

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<sup>48</sup> Edward Stettinius to Harry S. Truman, April 18, 1945, Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files, Box 161, Palestine - 1945-1947, Truman Library.

<sup>49</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 51; Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S. – Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 5.

Hailed as the architect of Allied victory in Europe, the former Chief of Staff of the Army was also credited with the European Recovery Plan (ERP) that bore his name. The retired General was popular in the press and widely viewed as a non-partisan actor on behalf of America's best interests abroad. However, on the issue of a Jewish state in Palestine, Marshall sharply disagreed with the President's White House staff. In a rebuke of presidential advisor Clark Clifford's recommendation that Truman quickly recognize Israel to shore up election support and beat the Soviets to the punch, Marshall stated that this rash action would have the opposite effect and that he himself would "vote against the President."<sup>50</sup> The tension between Truman and Marshall was a key component of the inner workings of the 1948 election campaign and will be elaborated on later in this work. Despite this, Marshall's efforts were in vain. Truman's recognition came just two months after the State Department published the following in a report titled *Review of Current Trends in U.S. Foreign Policy*:

[Regarding U.S. policy towards Palestine and the Middle East] The pressures to which this government is now subjected are ones which impel us toward a position where we would shoulder major responsibility for the maintenance, and even the expansion, of a Jewish state in Palestine. To the extent that we move in this direction, we will be operating directly counter to our major security interests in that area. For this reason, our policy in the Palestine issue should be dominated by the determination to avoid being impelled along this path... [Should this happen] this would then mean that we had consented to be guided, in a highly important question affecting those areas, not by national interest but by other considerations. If we tried, in the face of this fact, to continue with policy in adjacent areas motivated solely by national interest, we would be faced with a duality of purpose which would surely lead in the end to a dissipation and confusion of effort. We cannot operate with one objective in one area, and with a conflicting one next door.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Memorandum of Conversation by George Marshall, May 12, 1948, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948, vol. 5, part 2, *The Near East, South Asia, and Africa (in two parts)* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 972-976.

<sup>51</sup> Review of Current Trends U.S. Foreign Policy, February 24, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 1:510-529.

This prescient report stands as one of the stronger and more reasoned statements warning President Truman to be prudent in handling Middle East affairs. More importantly, it revealed a potential conflict of interest in American foreign policy and begs the question, why did President Truman recognize Israel?

Leading the nation in the first years of the Cold War, President Truman's decisions set foreign policy precedents for both his administration and those that followed. Outlining a commitment to free people of the world, the Truman Doctrine stated that America would provide economic aid and military assistance to "help those nations which wanted to preserve their freedoms and to set up a bulwark against totalitarian aggression."<sup>52</sup> In the language of documents like NSC 20/4 and The Truman Doctrine, the term "free people" often translated to democracy, an institution Zionist lobbyists and diplomats vociferously committed to, while "totalitarian aggression" almost explicitly meant communism.<sup>53</sup>

Guided by such principles, President Truman symbolically demonstrated American support for democracy by quickly recognizing the new nation only eleven minutes after it declared independence at midnight on May 14, 1948.<sup>54</sup> However, was this decision truly in the nation's best interest? Or, as the State Department argued, was it a dangerous policy that would jeopardize U.S. concerns in the region? Answering these questions is a central purpose of this essay and to do so it is helpful to understand what role President Truman saw for the United States' in the post-war world and how he interpreted American values and interests abroad.

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<sup>52</sup> "The Truman Doctrine," ca. 1952, Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files, Box 196, Foreign Policy: Greek-Turkish Aid Program, Truman Library.

<sup>53</sup> Memorandum of Conversation with the Foreign Minister of Israel and Others, March 22, 1949, Acheson Papers, Secretary of State File, Memoranda of Conversations File, 1949-1953, Box 65, March, 1949, Truman Library.

<sup>54</sup> Recognition of Israel (draft), May 14, 1948, Ross Papers, Alphabetical Correspondence File, 1916-1950, Box 13, Truman Library.

To define President Truman's diplomatic worldview, it is necessary to look no further than the doctrine that bore his name. In a speech to a joint session of Congress on March 10, 1947, Truman whole heartedly endorsed the policy of containment through the spread of democracy; however, his remarks reveal a uniquely benevolent tone reminiscent of Woodrow Wilson. Truman's address was aimed at securing congressional approval for the Greek-Turkish Aid Program, an endeavor designed to financially and administratively support the struggling democratic governments of those nations, the former of which was under siege by a violent leftist insurgency. The argument for supporting this program seems self-evident considering the Cold War policy platform detailed above, but three elements of his speech give cause for review and divulge the more nuanced approach Truman took in applying policy overseas.

First, the speech betrayed Truman's desire to fight for the less fortunate, especially the victims of authoritarian rule in the recent war. "Greece has never been a rich country. Poverty of natural resources has always forced the Greek people to work hard to make both ends meet. This industrious and peaceful nation has, since 1940, suffered invasion, four years of cruel enemy occupation, and bitter internal strife."<sup>55</sup> The Greeks, like the Jews, were victims of Nazi persecution and, as such, it is possible to draw parallels between how the President might act when faced with the prospect of Jewish statehood only a year later. President Truman continued, "It would be an unspeakable tragedy if these countries, which have struggled so long for their independence against overwhelming odds, should lose that victory for which they sacrificed so much."<sup>56</sup> Replace "countries" with "Jews" in the above passage and the President would have echoed the rallying cry of Zionist advocates around the world. Aside from evoking similarities

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<sup>55</sup> Draft of Speech, March 10, 1947, Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files, Box 29, January-March, 1947, Truman Library.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

between the Jews and the Greeks, this passage is important because it reveals the President's sympathy for the underdog and affirms his belief that the U.S. should act to help the less fortunate; a theme that will re-emerge when the impact of the Holocaust is examined.

Second, while Truman acknowledged the importance of the United Nations in resolving issues like the situation in Greece, he argued that, in times of crisis, the United States had a moral obligation to act unilaterally in support of "free peoples" facing aggression from "totalitarian regimes."<sup>57</sup> With Europe in ruin, the President believed that, when time was of the essence, it was up to the United States to prevent catastrophe or communist expansion.

Finally, and most importantly, the President concluded his address by tying U.S. security to a people's right to self-determination. He stated, "We must face the realization that today, the future security of this nation and the peace of the world depends upon a continuation of the fundamental belief in human freedom and democracy. Not only within our country, but among the peoples of the world."<sup>58</sup> Here, Truman was advocating action; a proactive U.S. foreign policy bent on securing Americans at home by promoting U.S. values abroad. This theme became a central tenet of U.S. foreign policy in the second half of the twentieth century and stands in stark contrast to the isolationist policies prevalent before World War II. However, in 1947, it proved particularly fortuitous for the Greeks and, a year later, it surely played some part in persuading Truman to act on behalf of the Jews. These were the values laden themes that would color Truman's approach to the otherwise practical field of foreign policy.

Although the President understood and supported the pragmatic approach to foreign policy espoused by the State Department, his decisions would be shaped by moral considerations

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<sup>57</sup> Draft of Speech, March 10, 1947, Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files, Box 29, January-March, 1947, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

that, at times, would cause disagreements between the two. Truman seemed ready and much more willing than the State Department to devote U.S. resources to causes that, on the surface, did not necessarily appear as being in the United States' best interest. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that, in 1948, the State Department was still struggling to understand and embody the President's new, proactive foreign policy. Or, more likely, the staffers at the State Department favored a cautious approach to foreign policy that would not upset the delicate diplomatic relationships they had worked so hard to cultivate. While recognizing that this moral undertone may have led to general disagreements between Truman and his State Department, it would be a stretch to conclude that it was the primary motive behind his decision to recognize Israel. Surely it played a role, but there is little evidence to support its position as a primary mover on the subject; this was a complex issue with high stakes, serious repercussions, and numerous actors involved. However, it is important to acknowledge the ethical lens through which Truman viewed U.S. interests and how this translated into his policy decisions abroad. Having built this framework, it is now possible to explore what issues drove President Truman to recognize Israel and, in the ever-contested world of democratic government, it is best to start by examining one of the unique features of the American political system: the lobby.

### *The Zionist Lobby*

As stated in the introduction, domestic politics played a pivotal role in persuading the President to recognize Israel. The domestic pressure Truman felt concerning the Palestine issue manifested itself in two primary ways, election year partisan politics and the Zionist lobby. Of the many frameworks historians and political scientists constructed to better explain U.S. foreign relations and international affairs, J. Garry Clifford's "bureaucratic politics" approach best describes how domestic political pressure can undermine otherwise rational foreign policy

decisions and shape U.S. strategy.<sup>59</sup> Clifford explains that in a democracy “there is no single ‘maker’ of foreign policy. Policy flows instead from an amalgam of organizations and political actors who differ substantially on any particular issue and who compete to advance their own personal and organizational interests as they try to influence decisions.”<sup>60</sup> This constant struggle between competing interests may occasionally lead to compromise but, often, a decision maker will side with one of the many parties involved in the dispute to the dismay of rival factions. This is particularly true in foreign relations, where the President is given much greater leeway to create policy than on domestic issues. Clifford’s construct is certainly evident in the internal dispute over Palestine between the State Department and White House advisors however, his framework can also be applied to understanding the influential power wielded by the Zionist lobby. Here was a group who had been lobbying hard for their cause since the day the President took office.

Secretary of State Edward Stettinius warned President Truman about the tenacity of the Zionist lobby less than a week after he took office in April of 1945. In a letter Stettinius told Truman, “It is very likely that efforts will be made by some of the Zionist leaders to obtain from you at an early date some commitments in favor of the Zionist program which is pressing for unlimited Jewish immigration into Palestine and the establishment there of a Jewish state.”<sup>61</sup> Stettinius went on to caution Truman about making any public statements on the issue as, “we have interests in the area which are vital to the United States, we feel that this whole subject is

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<sup>59</sup> J. Garry Clifford, “Bureaucratic Politics,” *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 1 (June 1990): 161-168, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.libez.lib.georgiasouthern.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=31d859fa-9cd8-40b8-9d05-fe7b7e7d197e%40sessionmgr4010&hid=127>.

<sup>60</sup> Clifford, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 162.

<sup>61</sup> Edward Stettinius to Harry S. Truman, April 18, 1945, Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Foreign Affairs File, Box 161, Palestine - 1945-1947, Truman Library.



one that should be handled with the greatest care and with a view to the long-range interests of this country.”<sup>62</sup> Here, Stettinius not only warned of the strength of the Zionist lobby, but he also recognized that their aims were at odds with greater U.S. interests in the Middle East.

In a subsequent State Department memorandum to the President, these interests were clearly defined as oil, “...one of the greatest material prizes in world history,” as well as stressing the strategic geographic importance of the Middle East as bridge between east and west.<sup>63</sup> Essentially, Stettinius was concerned that the new President would upset delicate U.S. relations with oil rich Arab countries if he caved to the wishes of the Zionist lobby. Shortly thereafter, Truman acknowledged the audacity and pressure of the Jewish lobby in a letter to Congressman Arthur Klein writing, “I don’t think there has ever been any more lobbying and pulling and hauling than has been carried on by the Jews in this Palestine difficulty with which we have been faced.”<sup>64</sup> Obviously making an impact on the President, the influence of the Zionist lobby cannot be ignored.

While not nearly as heated or political as later visits would be, President Truman received the first of many Jewish special interest groups at the White House only six weeks after assuming duties as president. On May 28, 1945, a party of Jewish War Veterans visited the White House and “pledged the support of the new President of the surviving 250,000 veterans of

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<sup>62</sup> Edward Stettinius to Harry S. Truman, April 18, 1945, Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Foreign Affairs File, Box 161, Palestine - 1945-1947, Truman Library.

<sup>63</sup> Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State (Acheson) to the Secretary of State, October 9, 1945, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, vol. 8, *The Near East and Africa* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 43-48.

<sup>64</sup> Correspondence between Arthur Klein and Harry S. Truman, May 3, 1948, Truman Papers, Official File, Box 204, Miscellaneous Correspondence, re: Palestine, May 1948, Truman Library.

World War I and the 600,000 Americans of Jewish faith now serving in the armed forces.”<sup>65</sup>

Although not an official push for Jewish statehood, groups like the Jewish War Veterans applied indirect pressure on the President to develop policies they found favorable. Meetings like these would only escalate in frequency and tenor with the eventual first President of Israel, Chaim Weizmann, visiting the President in the Oval Office three times in the run up to Israeli statehood.<sup>66</sup> In fact, Jewish advocacy groups and lobbyists met with the president in the White House a total of twelve times between 1945 and the declaration of Israeli statehood in May of 1948.<sup>67</sup>

On the contrary, there were no meetings with Palestinian advocacy groups, and the only direct correspondence Truman had with Arab representatives during this period was a meeting with the Saudi ambassador over their displeasure about the growing tide of U.S. support for the partition of Palestine. However, these meetings were not the only way the Zionist lobby pressured Truman. The President received numerous personal letters from friends and citizens across the country that urged him to consider taking a more solid stand in favor of the Zionist cause. As the United Nations debated whether to implement the UNSCOP partition plan, Truman received letters from old friends like Edward Jacobson who appealed to the President to do all he could to ensure the partition plan (U.N. Resolution 181) passed. Jacobson pressed Truman

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<sup>65</sup> “Truman Host to J.W.V. Commander,” *The Jewish Post*, June 15, 1945, accessed March 4, 2016, <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=JPOST19450615-01.1.5>.

<sup>66</sup> Harry S. Truman Library, “The President’s Day,” accessed March 14, 2016, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/main.php?currMonth=5&currYear=1945&searchterm=Weizmann&bool=AND&searchterm1=&yearstart=1945&yearend=1948&limit=50&lowerlimit=0>.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

because, “The future of one and one-half million Jews in Europe depends on what happens at the present meeting of the United Nations.”<sup>68</sup>

Pressure from these meetings and letters began to take an apparent toll on Truman as evidenced from a diary entry after a meeting with his former Treasury Secretary, Henry Morgenthau, who was now working full time for the Zionist Lobby. Concerning their July 1947 meeting Truman recorded, “The Jews have no sense of proportion, nor do they have any judgment on world affairs...The Jews, I find, are very selfish. They care not how many Estonians, Latvians, Finns, Poles, Yugoslavs or Greeks get murdered or mistreated or D.P. [displaced] as long as the Jews get special treatment.”<sup>69</sup> This candid diary entry reveals much of Truman’s frustration with the Zionist lobby as they worked hard to change his tepid position in favor of Jewish statehood. However, as frustrating as these meetings may have been, they undoubtedly had some impact on Truman.

As noted earlier, in the course of only three years, President Truman went from stating that the Jewish issue in Palestine was a problem for “the British and the Arabs” to being the first head of state to recognize Israel nation only minutes after it declared statehood.<sup>70</sup> While the Zionist lobby cannot take full credit for changing the President’s position on this sensitive subject, their efforts influenced his thinking on the matter. As the horrors of the Holocaust were made public, and international pressure mounted to find a solution to the pressing issue of displaced persons in Europe, the Zionist lobby incorporated these themes to play on, what

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<sup>68</sup> Correspondence between Harry S. Truman and Edward Jacobson, October 3 and 8, 1947, Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Foreign Affairs File, Box 161, Palestine - 1945-1947, Truman Library.

<sup>69</sup> Harry S. Truman diary entry, July 21, 1947, Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 234, Truman Library.

<sup>70</sup> Harry S. Truman, “The President’s News Conference,” *The American Presidency Project*, August 16, 1945, accessed February 19, 2016, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12389](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12389).

historian Steven Spiegel identified as, Truman's sympathy for the "plight of the Jews."<sup>71</sup> The unspeakable atrocities committed against European Jewry, more than any other factor, gave traction to the Zionist cause and added credibility to their cries for a Jewish home in the Middle East. For this reason, the impact of the Holocaust on the President deserves further analysis.

### *Post-Holocaust Sympathy*

The pain, suffering, and loss experienced by European Holocaust survivors and displaced Jews played an important part in altering President Truman's position on the issue of Jewish statehood. Six months after entering office the President outlined his position with regards to the Jewish situation in Europe. On November 13, 1945, Truman announced the creation of an Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry to study the problem of displaced persons in Europe and recommend potential solutions. While he by no means called for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, the President did posit his support for increased Jewish immigration to the area, but yielded to British concerns that immediate immigration was not feasible.<sup>72</sup> In this statement Truman referenced the Holocaust as the primary reason for the creation of the committee whose second of four aims was, "To examine the position of the Jews in those countries in Europe where they have been the victims of Nazi and Fascist persecution."<sup>73</sup> In April of 1946, after receiving the findings of the Anglo-American Committee, Truman enthusiastically supported their recommendation that 100,000 European Jews be admitted into

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<sup>71</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 19.

<sup>72</sup> Harry S. Truman, "Statement by the President on the Problem of Jewish Refugees in Europe," November 13, 1945, Public Papers of the President, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed March 15, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=12291&st=Palestine&st1=>

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

Palestine.<sup>74</sup> In this same statement the President escalated his previous position by recommending “the further development of a Jewish National Home.”<sup>75</sup> While not yet explicitly calling for the creation of a Jewish state, his reference to a “Jewish National Home” is a powerful indication of the President’s evolving position on the subject. A position that, only six months later, took yet another surprising turn in what came to be known as the Yom Kippur statement.<sup>76</sup>

The Yom Kippur statement is noteworthy because it was the first time Truman endorsed the idea of a “viable Jewish state.”<sup>77</sup> He also reemphasized the Holocaust as a primary reason for this new position. Calling for action on the Anglo-American Committee’s recommendations Truman declared, “In light of the terrible ordeal which the Jewish people of Europe endured during the recent war and the crisis now existing, I cannot believe that a program of immediate action along the lines suggested above could not be worked out with the cooperation of all people concerned.”<sup>78</sup> Although a year earlier than his Greek-Turkish Aid address to congress, the sympathies Truman betrayed in the Yom Kippur statement align with the ethical tone he wished to apply to his foreign policy. Like the embattled Greeks, the Jews were an underdog and their persecution at the hands of the Nazis placed Truman squarely in their corner. The above statements reveal the impact the Holocaust had on Truman’s position on Palestine, however, the

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<sup>74</sup> Harry S. Truman, “Statement by the President on Receiving Report of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry,” April 30, 1946, Public Papers of the President, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed March 15, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12643>.

<sup>75</sup> Harry S. Truman, “Statement by the President on Receiving Report of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry,” April 30, 1946, Public Papers of the President, *The American Presidency Project*.

<sup>76</sup> Harry S. Truman, “Statement by the President Following the Adjournment of the Palestine Conference in London,” October 4, 1946, Public Papers of the President, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed March 15, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12520>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

President wasn't the only American influenced by the horrors perpetrated against the European Jews and greater American sentiment surely persuaded his decision.

While the British and American governments mulled over the findings of the Anglo-American Committee, a group of frustrated U.S. Senators penned a surprisingly emphatic letter to President Truman urging him to act on the committee's findings. The letter, drafted by New York Senator Robert Wagner and signed by nine of his colleagues, pointed to the horrors of the Holocaust as ample motive to act, unilaterally if necessary, to ensure the immediate immigration of 100,000 European Jews into Palestine. Notable for its tone, the letter began:

The case for the immediate admission into Palestine of 100,000 Jews who have been the victims of Nazi persecution is written in blood and suffering:

1. From 1933 on, the Jews of Europe were the first signal and final depths of Nazi persecution and barbarism.

2. In Hitler's concentration and extermination camps, 6,000,000 Jews were tortured, gassed or burned to death. The rest suffered horrors not much better than death.

3. The 1,500,000 Jews still left alive in Europe are largely destitute, unwanted or homeless with a well-grounded need and want to migrate to Palestine and leave the scene of the horrors inflicted on them.<sup>79</sup>

Senator Wagner's letter highlighted the horrors of the Holocaust and emphasized the need for justice in righting the wrongs committed by the Nazis. It was also representative of growing national sympathies for European Jews. By this time, news of the Holocaust was widespread and had been covered in detail by the nation's press. As early as May of 1945, *The New York Times* reported that "Hitler was directly responsible for the destruction of Jews in Germany and in German-occupied countries."<sup>80</sup> As further details emerged about the Holocaust, the *Times* reported the staggering death toll of European Jews and described Nazi plans to

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<sup>79</sup> Assorted Members of the U.S. Senate to Harry S. Truman, June 20, 1946, Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files, Foreign Affairs File, Box 161, Palestine - 1945-1947, Truman Library.

<sup>80</sup> "All Jews Hounded Under Hitler Rule," *The New York Times*, May 2, 1945.

completely exterminate all Jews by 1946.<sup>81</sup> But Senators and the press were not the only actors that pointed to the Holocaust when they petitioned the President to support the Zionist cause. In an October 1947 letter, Truman's friend and former business partner Edward Jacobson reminded him about the atrocities perpetrated against the Jews when he wrote, "How will they be able to survive another winter in concentration camps and the Hell holes in which they live, is beyond my imagination. In all this World, there is only one place where they can go – and that is Palestine. You and I know only too well this is the only answer."<sup>82</sup> With pressure from the Zionist lobby steadily mounting, and the disposition of over a million displaced Jews still unresolved, it was only a matter of time before the Palestine question would spill over into domestic politics.

#### *Domestic Politics and the 1948 Presidential Election*

The role of domestic politics in pushing Truman to solidify his stance on a Jewish home in Palestine is undeniable. As Truman stumped hard on the campaign trail on the eve of the 1948 presidential election he claimed that he had done all in his power to keep from using the sensitive subject for personal political gain, "I wish to speak now upon a subject that has been of great interest to me as your President. It is the subject of Israel. Now, this is a most important subject and must not be resolved as a matter of politics during a political campaign. I have refused consistently to play politics with that question."<sup>83</sup> However, only moments later, in an act more reminiscent of current political pandering, Truman emphatically touted his firm support for the

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<sup>81</sup> "80% of Reich Jews Murdered by Nazis," *The New York Times*, June 10, 1945.

<sup>82</sup> Correspondence between Harry S. Truman and Edward Jacobson, October 3 and 8, 1947, Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files, Foreign Affairs File, Box 161, Palestine - 1945-1947, Truman Library.

<sup>83</sup> Harry S. Truman, Address in Madison Square Garden, New York City, October 28, 1948, Public Papers of the President, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed March 15, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=13075>.

creation of Israel. He argued that from the start of his time in office he had vehemently favored increasing Jewish immigration to Palestine and that, under his leadership, the United States was the first nation to recognize the state.<sup>84</sup> Most notable was Truman's insinuation that he was personally "responsible for the resolution of the United Nations setting up Israel, not only as a homeland, but as a free and independent political state."<sup>85</sup> This comment was an exaggeration at best and an outright lie at worst.

Although the Truman administration certainly played a part in the creation of the U.N. Partition Plan, they had no legitimate claim to creating Israel as a "free and independent political state." Instead, Israel arrived at statehood through hard fought battles on the streets of Palestine and the international halls of the United Nations. Truman exaggerated his role in the march towards Jewish statehood in an effort to win support from key voters in New York, and while this campaign address may serve as the most blatant example of Israel's use as a tool of domestic politics, it was by no means the first.

Early in his presidency Truman recognized the value of Palestine and the Zionist lobby in domestic politics. Polling data from March 1948 suggests that Americans were rather ambivalent about the contest for Palestine; however, of those with an opinion, 28% were sympathetic to the Jewish cause while only 11% sided with the Arabs.<sup>86</sup> These numbers are most likely indicative of a public weary of further involvement in a foreign conflict in the aftermath of World War II but, empathetic towards the plight of the Jews. In an effort to quell State Department concerns that his support for Jewish immigration into Palestine was upsetting the Arab states, Truman

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<sup>84</sup> Harry S. Truman, Address in Madison Square Garden, New York City, October 28, 1948, Public Papers of the President, *The American Presidency Project*.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> "The American Public and Israel," Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, Cornell University, accessed March 29, 2017, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/american-public-israel/>.



reportedly told Secretary of State James Byrnes and United States Minister to Saudi Arabia William Eddy, “I’m sorry, gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents.”<sup>87</sup> Recognizing that, up to November 1948, Truman had yet to win a presidential election, his preoccupation with defeating Thomas Dewey and officially claiming the title President of the United States is much more understandable. The fact that Dewey was the former Governor of New York, a state with a large Jewish population, puts the desperate struggle for votes there into context and highlights the importance of Palestine in domestic politics. Truman understood this and realized that his handling of the Palestine issue could either tip the election in his favor or cost him precious votes.

The 1948 election promised to be difficult for the President. Truman and Democratic Party functionaries recognized this and, as early as 1947, began preparing for the fight set to take place the following year. In a comprehensive forty-three-page campaign strategy, Truman advisor Clark Clifford noted the challenges the incumbent President faced in the upcoming election. He wrote that, “Just a year ago the probability was that any Republican could be elected,” and, “The campaign of 1948 will be a tough, bitterly fought struggle.”<sup>88</sup> He then dissected each demographic voting bloc and outlined the issues deemed relevant therein. With regards to the Jewish vote Clifford remarked, “no candidate since 1876 has lost New York and won the Presidency...Centered in New York City, that vote [the Jewish vote] is normally Democratic and, if large enough, is sufficient to counteract the upstate vote and deliver the state

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<sup>87</sup> Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948*, Reprint ed. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 322.

<sup>88</sup> Memorandum, Clark Clifford to Harry S. Truman, November 19, 1947, Clifford Papers, Political File, Box 22, Confidential Memo to the President [Clifford-Rowe Memorandum], Truman Library.

to President Truman. Today the Jewish bloc is interested primarily in Palestine.”<sup>89</sup> Recognizing the importance of the Jewish vote to the upcoming election, Clifford worked hard to push the President to make policy decisions agreeable to this critical voting bloc.

On foreign policy Clifford emphasized the importance of taking a robust stand to stop the spread of communism, “There is considerable political advantage to the Administration in its battle with the Kremlin.”<sup>90</sup> This theme was central to Clifford’s argument for Truman’s recognition of Israel the following year and will be elaborated on later. However, even more telling was Clifford’s assessment of Truman’s perceived weakness on foreign affairs. Clifford described the Republican strategy in this field as, “what is good is Marshall, what is bad is Truman” and emphasized the need for the President to strike out as the leader and architect of U.S. foreign policy.<sup>91</sup> “President Truman must assume before the eyes of the people the leadership on foreign policy. Today the American people identify Secretary Marshall, and not the President, as our spokesman. This may have substantive advantages because of its non-partisan aura – but unhappily it is bad politics for 1948.”<sup>92</sup> The premise here, that Truman needed to assert himself in the field of foreign policy, surely shaped his decision when, only six months later, he defied the popular Secretary of State by recognizing Israel. From Truman’s perspective, this was a lucrative proposal. Taking a firm stance on Jewish immigration and statehood could demonstrate strength in foreign affairs and appeal to Jewish voters in New York, thereby giving Truman the opportunity to steal a critical 47 votes from his rival’s home territory. From the

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<sup>89</sup> Memorandum, Clark Clifford to Harry S. Truman, November 19, 1947, Clifford Papers, Political File, Box 22, Confidential Memo to the President [Clifford-Rowe Memorandum], Truman Library.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

historian's perspective, it betrays how foreign policy decisions can be subverted to domestic political objectives and lends credence to the argument that Truman's decision was not necessarily motivated by the nation's best interests but, instead, by his own. Overall, this revealing look inside the Truman campaign strategy demonstrates the political importance of the Palestine issue and the President's need to improve his foreign policy résumé; sentiments that were increasingly emphasized as the election drew near.

Sensing growing displeasure among the electorate with Truman's perceived inaction in the international arena, a 1948 internal memorandum urged the President to personally exercise "vigorous leadership in the field of foreign affairs."<sup>93</sup> The memorandum stated that increasing instability in places like Italy, coupled with the growing reach of the Soviet Union, made the President appear weak in his foreign policy. Although short, the four-page memorandum outlined three key foreign policy goals for the President that, if successful, would bolster his support in the upcoming election. The third goal gives evidence of the political value of Palestine in the 1948 election. It read:

At the earliest possible time, the President should state what we propose to do regarding partition in Palestine. This should be carefully timed. For instance, [referencing the U.S. arms embargo on Palestine] lifting of the embargo should be announced in such a way that Jewish leaders will get the credit and yet under circumstances that clearly show the President was not pressured into action.<sup>94</sup>

This memorandum divulges how the Truman administration planned to use the Palestine situation to their political advantage in the election while noting the growing Zionist pressure on the President to support the Jewish cause. It also lends credence to the idea that the President's bold decision to counteract his Secretary of State was influenced by domestic considerations in

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<sup>93</sup> "Proposed Action in Foreign Affairs by President," ca. 1948, Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files, Political File, Box 50, Strategy: General, Truman Library.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

the run up to the 1948 election. This strategy, of using Israel to both secure the Jewish vote in states like New York and simultaneously demonstrate strength in foreign affairs, points to the critical role of domestic politics in influencing Truman's decision to quickly recognize Israel.

While the above memorandums indicate how the Truman administration planned on using the Palestine issue to their advantage in the upcoming election, their actions during the 1948 campaign reveal the weight the President and his staff placed on the value of Israel in his reelection bid. As noted earlier, Israel's declaration of statehood on May 14, 1948 was met with an immediate invasion by Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq in the First Arab-Israeli War. In an attempt to end the conflict, the United Nations, under mediator Folke Bernadotte, proposed a peace plan that, in exchange for recognizing Israel as a sovereign nation, Jordan would assume control of the territories allotted for Palestine in the original UNSCOP partition plan (minor border adjustments were also presented).<sup>95</sup> Although acceptance of the plan would result in official recognition of Israel, it also meant that Israel would have to give up some of the territories outside of the UNSCOP partition plan that it gained in the recent conflict. Unfortunately, neither the Israelis nor the Arabs were willing to accept this compromise and the plan, which came to be known as the Bernadotte Plan, began to flounder. After easily defeating the combined army that attacked them, and making territorial gains at their expense, the Israelis became ever more reluctant to accept the provisions of the Bernadotte Plan. So too did opposition to the plan rise in domestic political circles.

While Truman initially distanced himself from the growing conflict in Palestine, the President eventually agreed to support the Bernadotte Plan in July of 1948 by offering

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<sup>95</sup> Hahn, *United States – Middle East Relations*, 29.

approximately 120 U.S. soldiers to serve as U.N. observers.<sup>96</sup> George Marshall, whose State Department had been the strongest U.S. cohort advancing the Bernadotte Plan, expressed the renewed pressure he was feeling from the Zionist lobby to ditch the plan. In an October 1, 1948 message to his Undersecretary of State, Robert Lovett, Marshall described how Republican Presidential candidate Thomas Dewey was feeling out a potential rift between the State Department and the White House over the Bernadotte Plan in an attempt to exploit it for his personal political gain.<sup>97</sup> He went on to describe how he was “receiving strong if not violent Jewish demands, particularly from Congressional Jews” to abandon the Bernadotte Plan.<sup>98</sup> Just as Marshall was feeling pressure to drop the plan, so too was Truman; even more so in light of the rapidly approaching election.

On October 24, 1948, a crowd of over 5,000 protestors, including prominent members of the Jewish War Veterans - the first group to meet with Truman after he took office - marched through New York City decrying the Bernadotte Plan. *The New York Times* carried the headline “Zionist Leaders in the Bronx Call for U.S. Rejection of Bernadotte Plan.”<sup>99</sup> The President faced a dilemma. The unpopularity of the Bernadotte Plan among the Zionist lobby meant that if Truman continued to support Marshall and advance the peace plan he could risk undoing any political favor garnered by recognizing Israel in May. This was especially true if Dewey announced his opposition to the plan and sided with the Jewish lobby against it. This prompted

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<sup>96</sup> The Secretary of State to the United Nations Mediator in Palestine (Bernadotte), July 19, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 5:1230.

<sup>97</sup> The Secretary of State (Marshall) to the Acting Secretary of State (Lovett), October 1, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 5:1446.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> “5,000 Join Parade for Israel Action,” *The New York Times*, October 25, 1948.

an interesting exchange between the two campaigns over who could best court the Jewish vote in light of the situation in Israel.

Neither Truman nor Dewey wished to be labeled as opposed to peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and neither desired to openly undermine George Marshall's efforts to promote the Bernadotte Plan but, both candidates realized the risks associated with holding on to the plan in the face of its rising unpopularity. The campaigns watched each other closely for signs that the other would make a move to denounce the plan in an effort to win the Jewish vote. A conversation between Undersecretary of State Lovett and Truman advisor Clark Clifford reveals how mounting pressure from the Zionist lobby was pushing the administration to back pedal on its initial support for the plan. Lovett recalled how Truman was "deeply concerned" by the State Department's pressure to openly endorse the Bernadotte Plan and that the administration was looking for an "alternative" option to appease Jewish angst.<sup>100</sup> The alternative Truman advisors were contemplating was a conciliatory telegram to the noted Zionist Stephen Wise, reinforcing the administration's support for Israel and "timed for release during the period of [voter] registration in New York."<sup>101</sup> Here, Lovett revealed not only the rising pressure to drop the plan, but also the Truman administration's intent to do so at a time when they could capitalize on the move in the midst of the election.

However, on October 22, 1948, Dewey escalated the situation when he publicly reaffirmed his support for a Jewish state in Palestine unbound by the provisions of the Bernadotte plan in a letter to Dean Alfange of the American Christian Palestine Committee of

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<sup>100</sup> Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Robert Lovett and Clark Clifford, September 29, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 5:1430-1431.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

New York.<sup>102</sup> This prompted Truman to jettison any lingering support he may have had for the Bernadotte Plan. Two days later, on October 24, 1948, the President reaffirmed his support for Israel and distanced himself from the Bernadotte Plan by referencing the Democratic platform on Israel stating:

I wish to amplify the three portions of the platform about which there have been considerable discussion... The Democratic platform states that we approve the claims of Israel to the boundaries set forth in the United Nations resolution of November 29, 1947 [U.N. Resolution 181], and consider that modification thereof should be made *only if fully acceptable to the State of Israel* (my emphasis).<sup>103</sup>

By emphasizing the fact that the territorial claims outlined in the Bernadotte Plan had to be accepted by Israel, Truman, for all intents and purposes, killed any remaining hope for success in the Bernadotte Plan and attempted to reclaim support from the Jewish community. The dispute over the Bernadotte Plan demonstrated how Truman's initial political motive for recognizing Israel evolved into full-fledged support for the young nation under the pressures of the 1948 election. The critical fact that the President reversed his position on the Bernadotte Plan as Jewish voters in New York protested on the eve of the election shows the domestic political wrangling wrapped up in the Israel decision. Although Truman ultimately failed to win New York in the 1948 election, it was not for a lack of effort.<sup>104</sup> The campaign strategy that motivated him to contradict his Secretary of State by recognizing Israel, and then pushed him to condemn the Bernadotte Plan, reveals the power of domestic politics in shaping the President's decision on

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<sup>102</sup> Clayton Knowles, "Truman Reaffirms his Israel Stand in Reply to Dewey," *The New York Times*, October 25, 1948.

<sup>103</sup> Harry S. Truman, "Statement by the President on Israel," October 24, 1948, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed March 19, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=13065&st=Dewey&st1=Israel>.

<sup>104</sup> James A. Haggerty, "Dewey Wins State," *The New York Times*, November 3, 1948.

Israel. Yet, this wasn't the only consideration that weighed on Truman, as escalating Cold War tensions certainly played a part in moving the President to recognize Israel.

### *The Cold War*

As explained in the introduction, U.S. foreign policy aims during the Cold War sought to contain the growth of Soviet Communism by expanding U.S. influence over capitalist nations that could be integrated into a global marketplace and counted on to support U.S. interests as they arose. This translated into a balance-of-power political competition where the Soviet Union and the United States sought to increase their hegemony over non-aligned nations by drawing them into political blocs that looked to either Moscow or Washington for guidance and support. This competition for non-aligned states in the Middle East was responsible for much of the State Department's objection to Truman's recognition of Israel. At play were two conflicting concerns about the United States' role in the Middle East. On the one hand, the White House staff viewed Israel as a potentially powerful U.S. ally in the region. On the other was the State Department that, as noted earlier, was generally opposed to U.S. recognition of Israel on the basis that it would disrupt greater interests in the region and alienate potential Arab allies to the benefit of the Soviet Union.

In the wake of the UNSCOP partition plan, and the United States' endorsement of it, George Kennan, the Director of Policy Planning, analyzed the Cold War risks at stake in the region in a report to George Marshall. Kennan, who historian John Bew labeled "a paragon of American diplomatic realism," argued that the strategic value of the wider Middle East outweighed any potential gains from recognizing and supporting Israel.<sup>105</sup> He pointed to the value of Arab oil and favorable use of the Suez Canal as interests that required amicable relations

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<sup>105</sup> John Bew, *Realpolitik: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.



between the United States and the Middle East. Kennan described how American support for the partition of Palestine would sow discord among the Arabs that would be directed at the United States, and this, in turn, would open the region to Soviet infiltration. This line of reasoning highlighted the very real risk that a misstep in the Middle East could result in the region becoming a complete loss in the Cold War battle for influence. Finally, in a prescient analysis of Arab-American relations, Kennan wrote, “Any assistance the U.S. might give to the enforcement of partition would result in deep-seated antagonism for the U.S. in many sections of the Moslem world over a period of many years and would lay us open to the following consequences...Possible deaths, injuries and damages arising from acts of violence.”<sup>106</sup> He concluded his report by recommending that the United States “take no further initiative in implementing or aiding partition.”<sup>107</sup> However, only four months later, Truman’s recognition was a bold and decisive step that went well beyond simply supporting partition. This was due largely to the fact that he was receiving contradictory guidance from White House advisors like Clark Clifford.

In what was the strongest and most comprehensive rebuttal of the State Department’s opposition to continued support for partition, Clifford drafted a persuasive memorandum to the President outlining why continued support was imperative. In it, Clifford not only argued that popular U.S. sentiment demanded the President support the foundation of a Jewish home in Palestine, but that doing so would “strengthen our position vis-à-vis Russia.”<sup>108</sup> Clifford went on to argue that abandoning the United Nations partition plan would be demoralizing both at home

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<sup>106</sup> Report by the Policy Planning Staff on Position of the United States with Respect to Palestine PPS/19, January 19, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 5:546-554.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Memorandum by the President’s Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman, March 8, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 5:690-696.

and abroad and it would stand “in direct contradiction to your numerous statements that we mean to do everything possible to *support* the United Nations.”<sup>109</sup> However, Clifford’s strongest rebuke came when he tackled the issue of oil and Soviet influence in the region:

There are those who say that such a course of action will not get us oil, that the Arabs will not sell us oil if we back up the United Nations partition plan. The fact of the matter is that the Arab states must have oil royalties or go broke. For example, 90% of Saudi Arabia’s revenues come from American oil royalties. The Arab states have no customer for their oil other than the United States:

a) they must have dollars and can get dollars only from the United States;  
 b) their social and economic structure would be irreparably harmed by adopting Soviet orientation, and it would be suicide for their ruling classes to come within the Soviet sphere of influence;

America’s security and its oil interests in the Middle East depend upon effective enforcement of the United Nations decision on Palestine. In terms of military necessity, political and economic self-preservation will compel the Arabs to sell their oil to the United States. Their need of the United States is greater than our need of them.<sup>110</sup>

In one fell swoop Clifford dismantled the State Department’s concerns over continued U.S. support for partition in Palestine. He reminded the President of the importance of the decision to domestic politics at home and dispelled concerns over increasing Soviet influence in the region. Here, he argued that if the United States did not intervene and back the U.N. partition, the Soviet Union may step in and fill the void left by Britain’s pending withdrawal in May; a move directly at odds with the National Security Strategy of containment.<sup>111</sup> Effectively turning Kennan’s Cold War argument on its head, Clifford concluded his memorandum to the President by emphasizing the importance of gaining a new ally and building prestige in the region. He argued that Jewish Palestine was “strongly oriented to the United States, and away from Russia,”

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<sup>109</sup> Memorandum by the President’s Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman, March 8, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 5:690-696.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

and that, because of this, the U.S. had little option but to support the nascent nation.<sup>112</sup> Clifford pointed to the inherent loss of prestige if the United States refused to support the United Nations Partition Plan, and the potential for the Soviet Union to exploit the power vacuum if America backed away from its commitments in Palestine. This, he posited, would do greater damage to U.S. interests in the region with regards to stability and oil than any animosity garnered by supporting Israel. Instead, according to Clifford, the best way to defeat the Soviets and prevent their infiltration into the region was by taking a proactive stand in favor of partition.<sup>113</sup>

Although he lacked the clout of Secretary of State Marshall, Clifford was a key architect of Truman's 1948 reelection effort and spent more and more time with the President as the campaign ramped up. Granted such access, Clifford framed his Cold War case for supporting Israel against the backdrop of the election and made a compelling argument against the State Department's claims. Clifford's argument was successful because he couched it in the same containment rhetoric that the State Department did while simultaneously offering the President the potential for success domestically, something the State Department was unable to do. He defused the State Department's concerns over oil by declaring that the power of the American dollar would prove irresistible to the Arab states and that they would keep the oil flowing regardless of who the United States sided with in Palestine. He emphasized the importance of a strong U.S. presence in Palestine as a counter to Soviet inroads in the region, instead of a factor that would push Arab nations into Russian orbit. Finally, he argued that going back on the United States' initial support for the partition plan would result in a decline of prestige and influence both for America and the United Nations, potentially exposing the new international body to

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<sup>112</sup> Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman, March 8, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 5:690-696.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

domination by Soviet Russia. The argument evoked Truman's desire to support the United Nations and enhance the United States' role in it, a sentiment he fervently proclaimed in the Greek-Turkish Aid speech a year earlier.<sup>114</sup> Weighing Clifford's persuasive efforts, and with pressure mounting from the Zionist lobby, Truman came to understand support for Israel as a key component of the greater United States' Cold War effort. Recognizing the Jewish state would ensure a prominent role for America in the region, bolster U.N. efforts, and deny the Soviets any potential influence in Palestine.

### *Conclusion*

From the evidence presented above, it becomes apparent that the efforts of the Zionist lobby, post-Holocaust sympathy towards European Jews, carefully framed Cold War policy objectives, and, above all, domestic political concerns, coalesced to persuade President Truman to recognize Israel. As noted earlier, this was not a decision taken lightly as it required the President to strike out against his popular Secretary of State who had made a powerful argument against becoming overly involved in favor of a Jewish state. The State Department claimed that this would result in animosity and hatred from Arab nations whose oil was deemed to be of the utmost importance to U.S. strategic interests. They also argued that alienating the Arab states would expose the region to broader exploitation and influence by the Soviet Union, thereby undermining the U.S. strategy of containment. However, none of these arguments proved powerful enough to combat Truman's hunger for victory in the 1948 election or the influence of the Zionist lobby in light of the Holocaust. Instead, Truman received countless visits and letters

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<sup>114</sup> Draft of Speech, March 10, 1947, Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files, Box 29, January-March, 1947, Truman Library.

from influential figures, both in the Zionist community and out, that emphasized the horrors of this event in an effort to persuade the President.

In political circles, these passionate cries for assistance were viewed in the context of the pending presidential election and the potential for upsetting former New York Governor Thomas Dewey by winning the Jewish vote. With so much at stake for Truman in 1948, it only took a carefully constructed rebuke of the State Department's misgivings to push the President to side with Israel. Here, Truman's close advisor Clark Clifford, an experienced and influential former attorney, crafted an argument that made opposing the nascent nation appear as political suicide in both the domestic and international arenas. As such, Truman felt comfortable making the decision he did and emphasized this in a letter to Chaim Weizmann on November 29, 1948 when he wrote, "I have interpreted my re-election as a mandate from the American people to carry out the Democratic Platform – including, of course, the plank on Israel. I intend to do so."<sup>115</sup>

This, more than anything else, demonstrates the influential power of domestic politics and reveals the complete evolution of Truman's position on Israel. His position had evolved considerably during his time in office and gone was the tepid and noncommittal President of 1945. Truman was confident in his decision yet the question remained, would those that came after him, who would be forced to execute this policy in the complicated and tenuous diplomatic waters of Middle East, share this confidence? Or, would they find themselves at odds with this decision, much like President Barack Obama did when he attempted to craft a pragmatic approach to U.S. policy in the region only to face staunch opposition from a once close ally? Fortunately, historians would not have to wait until the twenty-first century for answers to these

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<sup>115</sup> Harry S. Truman to Chaim Weizmann, November 29, 1948, Clifford Papers, Subject File, Box 13, Palestine-Correspondence-Misc., Truman Library.

questions as, only a few years later, President Eisenhower found himself embroiled in the Middle East when conflict over a small but strategic canal threatened to upset the fragile peace in the region.

## CHAPTER 2

## NEW LEADERS IN A NEW WORLD

I read the long letter which you sent me under [the] date of May 15th, and return it for your files - if indeed it deserves such a place. It is about as incoherent as anything I have ever read. It would have us back Western colonialism. It says "there is nothing we can expect from the Arab world." How about oil? Without it Western Europe would collapse, industrially and militarily. It says we are "losing the cold war." Well, within the last three years, Russia has done far more than we would have dared to expect in terms of doing away with the barbarisms of Stalin and seeming, at least, to become a respectable member of the society of nations. Of course, that kind of Russia has more acceptability and less ostracism than the other kind.<sup>116</sup>

John Foster Dulles to President Eisenhower  
May 18, 1956

The 1950s were a tumultuous time for the United States in the Cold War and things were not going as planned either at home or abroad. Overseas, Chinese Communists under Mao Zedong now firmly controlled all of mainland China and the United States was unable to defeat Communist forces on the Korean Peninsula. In 1949, the Soviet Union joined the United States as a nuclear power. On the domestic front, it appeared that Communists were infiltrating American life as never before. The House Un-American Activities Committee was in full swing and McCarthyism gripped the nation. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg shone as examples of how far Soviets had gone in accessing highly sensitive U.S. programs like the Manhattan Project. By 1957 the Soviets took the visible lead in the space race by successfully launching the first satellite, Sputnik, into Earth's orbit. These Soviet achievements were not mere coincidence, but

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<sup>116</sup> John Foster Dulles to President Dwight Eisenhower, May 18, 1956, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President, 1953-1961 (Ann Whitman File), Dulles-Herter Series, Box 7, Dulles, Foster, May 1956, Eisenhower Library.

were the product of a newly energized Soviet platform to gain influence throughout the Third World by demonstrating the strength and ability of the U.S.S.R.<sup>117</sup>

The impetus for this new Soviet policy came from two unique sources. First, by 1950, Russia had recovered enough from World War II to begin focusing its collective energy on fostering Communist revolution in the unaligned Third World. However, even more than this economic regrowth, the second factor accountable for the Soviet Union's new foreign policy came on the heels of Joseph Stalin's death in 1953. Freed from what historian Odd Westad described as "Stalin's dogmatic adherence to the Marxist patterns of development," his successor, Nikita Khrushchev, applied a more pliable foreign policy that recognized the variety of forms potential Socialist governments could take and sought to engage heretofore neglected regions of the world.<sup>118</sup> But, even Khrushchev's *détente* had its limits and, when a popular uprising in Hungary in October 1956 threatened to undermine Soviet authority and jeopardize Warsaw Pact integrity, he quickly authorized a military intervention to crush the rebellion. The ensuing violence claimed the lives of 20,000 Hungarians.<sup>119</sup> While the Soviet operation in Hungary demonstrated Khrushchev's capacity for violence, it did not mean that he had reverted to the brutal and oppressive measures cherished by his predecessor. Instead, Khrushchev sought diplomatic and economic means of expanding Soviet influence and, when he looked out upon the world at the mid-century mark, the colorful Russian leader was delighted by the transitions taking place.

One such transition that excited the Soviets and worried the United States were the nationalist movements sweeping through former European colonies like India, Pakistan, and

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<sup>117</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 66-71.

<sup>118</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 65-67.

<sup>119</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 210-211.



Egypt.<sup>120</sup> In the minds of many U.S. politicians, nationalist movements like these were simply fronts for Communist organizers waiting to seize power after imperial regimes were thrown out and fragile native governments established.<sup>121</sup> The perception that Communism was gaining ground around the world affected a change in U.S. domestic politics as well. Westad argues that, “New Deal liberals came under attack from the Right for their failure to extend interventionism early and decisively enough.”<sup>122</sup> Eisenhower recognized this new threat from the Soviets and, in a message to Dulles, elaborated on it:

So long as [the] Soviets used force and the threat of force, we had the world’s natural reaction of fear to aid us in building consolidations of power and strength to resist Soviet advances. More recently they seem to challenge with economic weapons... So at first glance it would appear we are being challenged in the area of our greatest strength.<sup>123</sup>

Fearful that the Soviets were steadily gaining the upper hand, it was time for a change and, in the 1952 presidential election, the Republican party found just the man to put America back on top in the Cold War.

### *The Eisenhower Administration*

President Eisenhower, better known as “Ike,” embodied all the characteristics of a dedicated “Cold Warrior.” Demonstrating a knack for team building, diplomacy, and, above all, leadership, Eisenhower led an at times divided coalition to victory in Europe during World War II and is one of only five officers to achieve the rank of General of the Army.<sup>124</sup> Riding the tide

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<sup>120</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Secretary Dulles and General Franco, November 1, 1955, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memos of Conversation, General, E Through I (1), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>121</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 84.

<sup>122</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 25.

<sup>123</sup> Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez: Eisenhower Takes America into the Middle East* (New York: The Linden Press, 1981), 128.

<sup>124</sup> United States Army Center of Military History, “U.S. Army Five-Star Generals,” last modified May 7, 2015, accessed May 25, 2016, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/faq/5star.html>.

of his war-time popularity, Eisenhower soundly defeated his 1952 Democratic opponent, Adlai Stevenson, and entered office in January of 1953. At the dawn of his presidency Eisenhower took full advantage of American nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union and developed a rather hardline Cold War defense posture commonly referred to as the New Look. Under the New Look, the United States relied on its nuclear capabilities and the threat of “massive retaliation” to deter Communist expansion and wield influence the world over.<sup>125</sup> The New Look played out in two ways; first, through increased defense spending on nuclear armaments and technology, and, second, through largely public threats to employ such weapons. Adherence to the New Look prompted Eisenhower to respond to a reporter’s question about the probability of using tactical nuclear weapons during the Taiwan Straits conflict by stating, “Now, in any combat where these things can be used on strictly military targets for strictly military purposes, I see no reason why they shouldn’t be used just exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else.”<sup>126</sup>

Bellicose threats such as these were an important part of the New Look during Eisenhower’s first term but, as the Soviets crept towards nuclear parity with the United States, the New Look lost traction and the President himself expressed misgivings about the doctrine. In a 1956 National Security Council meeting Eisenhower stated that he:

regarded the present NATO strategic concept as being completely outmoded and as making no sense in the light of recent weapons developments and Soviet strategy...this business of arguing that you are going to defend these countries

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<sup>125</sup> Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), quoted in Merrill and Paterson, eds., *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations*, vol. 2, *Since 1914*, 6th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 303.

<sup>126</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, “The President’s News Conference,” March 16, 1955, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 25, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10434&st=&st1=>.

through recourse to nuclear weapons isn't very convincing. In point of fact, these countries do not wish to be defended by nuclear weapons.<sup>127</sup>

While a tough stance towards Communist expansion was what the American public desired, the New Look was begrudgingly replaced by the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). MAD was a doomsday deterrent prefaced on the notion that nuclear warfare had to be avoided at all costs as the consequences of it would lead to the complete destruction of the parties involved. Although apocalyptic in nature, the balance of power and relative stability it delivered compelled historian John L. Gaddis to credit it with sustaining the "long peace" of the Cold War.<sup>128</sup> However, it also meant that the United States could no longer rely solely on its military muscle to influence the outcome of Cold War disputes. Although MAD may have helped guarantee peace during the Cold War, its very existence forced the United States to find less dramatic ways to beat back Communist advances. America now had to rely on its diplomatic abilities and covert actions to contain the Soviet threat.<sup>129</sup> To accomplish this, Eisenhower employed his pragmatic, at times hot-headed, but supremely capable and experienced Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.

Dulles was a savvy diplomat, well versed in international relations with a resume dating back to his service as a delegate at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.<sup>130</sup> Like his boss, he was a dedicated Cold Warrior and, unlike the strife between Truman and his State Department,

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<sup>127</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 285th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, May 17, 1956, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, vol. 19, *National Security Policy*, ed. John P. Glennon, William Klingaman, David S. Patterson, and Ilana Stern (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 305-311.

<sup>128</sup> Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), quoted in Merrill and Paterson, eds., *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations*, vol. 2, *Since 1914*, 6th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 310.

<sup>129</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 26-27.

<sup>130</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 148.

Eisenhower and Dulles saw eye-to-eye on most issues, with Dulles remembered largely as Eisenhower's chief consultant and confidant who could be counted on to faithfully execute his policy decisions.<sup>131</sup> But, the architect of Eisenhower's pivot towards the Arabs would be put to the ultimate test in the Middle East. Here, Soviet arms deals, Egyptian nationalism, and rising Arab-Israeli tensions inspired fears that the United States was losing ground to the Russians and falling out of favor with the resource rich region.<sup>132</sup> This concern did not escape Eisenhower. A 1956 summary statement that he took the time to share with Dulles suggested the United States "had almost lost the Cold War...or that the least we can say is that we completely lost the initiative."<sup>133</sup> Even though neither Eisenhower nor Dulles ever believed this, they both recognized the stakes involved in America's contest with the Soviet Union and it is important to explore the values and worldview that guided their management of the strategic competition.

*Eisenhower's Worldview: Principled and Pragmatic*

Much is revealed through the statements, policies, and programs advanced by Eisenhower as he attempted to defuse the animosity that wracked the Middle East. The President can best be described as both principled and pragmatic in his foreign policy. This may sound counterintuitive but, Eisenhower demonstrated the unique ability to temper a realpolitik approach to foreign policy with the ethical mooring that opponents of such policy generally decry for its absence. While not as obvious as later policy crafted by Richard Nixon, who was undoubtedly influenced by it during his eight years as Vice President, elements of Eisenhower's realism can

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<sup>131</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 148.

<sup>132</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 164-165, 171.

<sup>133</sup> Message from Eisenhower to Dulles, May 15, 1956, Eisenhower, Dwight D., Papers as President, 1953-61, Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 7, Dulles, Foster, May 1956, Eisenhower Library.

be found in much of the work carried out by Dulles.<sup>134</sup> However, it is important to note that the essence of this realpolitik approach did not materialize until the final phase of policy intervention in the Middle East - the Eisenhower Doctrine - and, until that time, there was a principled tone evident throughout the settlement efforts attempted by the administration.

Eisenhower believed in doing what was ethically right, regardless of domestic fallout or angst from international allies. This was so important that it was the theme of his first inaugural address. After outlining his nine principles, Eisenhower emphasized their magnitude by stating, “A people that value its privileges above its principles soon loses both.”<sup>135</sup> On the foreign policy stage, this principled foundation was most evident in the initial debate over whether the United States should keep its obligations to the 1950 Tripartite Declaration and intervene militarily on behalf of Egypt shortly after the 1956 Israeli invasion. Here, Eisenhower “thought that in these circumstances perhaps we cannot be bound by our traditional alliances, but instead face the question of how to make good on our pledge.”<sup>136</sup> Not ready to commit the United States military to the fray, Eisenhower instead decided to pursue recourse through the United Nations where he advocated military and economic sanctions as a means of driving Israel out of Sinai.<sup>137</sup> This episode stands as just one of many where either Eisenhower or Dulles rebuked or threatened sanctions against an ally when it was perceived as the guilty party in stoking regional discord.<sup>138</sup> Eisenhower’s tough stance on Israel after its assault on Egypt, and his willingness to present a

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<sup>134</sup> Richard Haas, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 228.

<sup>135</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1953, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed February 23, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9600>.

<sup>136</sup> Memorandum of a Conference with the President, October 29, 1956, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, *Suez Crisis, July 26-December 31, 1956*, ed. John P. Glennon and Nina J. Norning (Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 833-839.

<sup>137</sup> Editorial Note, October 30, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 16:881-882.

<sup>138</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 158-167.

U.N. resolution requesting economic and military sanctions against it, reveals a values set grounded on principle. It becomes evident that the President was not influenced by religious, racial, cultural, or political ties; instead, he saw issues as right or wrong and was determined to stand up for what he believed was right.

Eisenhower's management of the 1956 presidential election and his concerted effort to keep domestic politics from overtly influencing foreign policy stand as further testament to the priority he placed on ethical leadership and decision making. That Israel's invasion of Egypt occurred only nine days before the 1956 presidential election placed Eisenhower in a tough position. A less ethical president may have played politics with the issue, preferring to take a gentler approach towards Israel to not throw off the Jewish vote on the eve of the election. Not Eisenhower. In a White House meeting to discuss the ramifications of Israel's 1956 invasion of Egypt, Eisenhower advocated a hard stance towards the Israeli aggressors. When queried about how his position may affect the upcoming election, Eisenhower was noted as saying that, "he does not care in the slightest whether he is re-elected or not. He feels we must make good on our word. He added that he did not really think the American people would throw him out in the midst of a situation like this, but if they did, so be it."<sup>139</sup> However, this principled approach to keeping domestic politics out of foreign policy did not begin in 1956. The record of a November 1953 Cabinet meeting provides the strongest example of Eisenhower's commitment to keeping the domestic sphere from interfering with foreign affairs:

The best policy at home, he [Eisenhower] said, was to do the right thing abroad even though this might temporarily alienate extremists in the United States. He cautioned the Cabinet against playing politics with foreign affairs. Obviously referring to Israel, which Dulles had just mentioned, the President said that he had

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<sup>139</sup> Memorandum of a Conference with the President, October 29, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:833-839.

been told of one case in which the Truman Administration had used foreign policy for domestic political advantage.<sup>140</sup>

Eisenhower's moral rectitude was such that he was willing to forgo a second term in office to stand by what he believed was ethically right, even if that meant upsetting strategically important relationships or forfeiting the election.

Although guided by a strong moral compass, Eisenhower and his staff worked hard to formulate a practical foreign policy that served the nation's best interests. This pragmatism is evident in the motives behind his pivot towards the Middle East with two elements providing a strong testament to this. First, Eisenhower's engagement with the Arabs was not done simply in the spirit of altruism and benign good will, instead, there were real interests involved; chiefly, oil and, second, containing the spread of Communism. In a meeting with Senator Walter George and State Department counselor Douglas MacArthur II, Dulles made clear both, "...we wished to retain the good will and friendship of the Arab States, not only because of their important strategic position but principally because of the oil resources they controlled. If the Soviets could get control of the Arab States, they could cut off the oil supplies to Western Europe."<sup>141</sup> Arabian oil served as the primary fuel source for America's closest ally, western Europe, and keeping that oil flowing became a strategic imperative for the Eisenhower administration.<sup>142</sup>

In a letter to English Prime Minister Anthony Eden on the eve of a London visit by Nikita Khrushchev, Eisenhower confirmed his commitment to denying the Soviets any advantage in the Middle East. The President wrote, "I fully agree with you that we should not be acquiescent in

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<sup>140</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 52.

<sup>141</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Secretary Dulles, Senator George, and Mr. MacArthur, March 30, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (2), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>142</sup> Secretary of State Congressional Leadership Briefing, April 10, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (2), Eisenhower Library.

any measure which would give the Bear's claws a grip on the production or transportation of the oil which is so vital to the defense and economy of the Western world."<sup>143</sup> Here, the Cold War struggle for resources took center stage and Arabian oil made the Middle East a strategically vital region. After the Suez Crisis placed western Europe's oil supply at risk, Eisenhower went even further in revealing the motives behind his pivot to the Arabs in a candid letter to his close friend Margaret Patterson. Mrs. Patterson had objected to Eisenhower's insistence that the British evacuate the Sinai as a preliminary step towards resolving the Suez Crisis.<sup>144</sup> In his response Eisenhower wrote:

For example, you realize that if we are to give our European friends help that will be of permanent value to them, the first thing that we must assure them is a durable source of oil. That source can be only the Middle East; consequently, you must see the need for proceeding cautiously at this moment in order that the entire Arab world, highly emotional by nature, does not become so incensed as to refuse to sell the needed oil.<sup>145</sup>

Confiding in his friend, Eisenhower dropped the niceties that so often color public political discourse and disclosed the real motive behind his administration's policy in the region. The President sided with the Arabs not only because he believed Anglo-French-Israeli aggression was wrong, but also because they sat on the world's largest known oil reserves. Eisenhower was being pragmatic and, despite perceived ties, he recognized that the western

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<sup>143</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower to Anthony Eden, April 5, 1956, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President, 1953-1961 (Ann Whitman File), Box 7, Dulles, John Foster Papers, April 1956, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>144</sup> Margaret Patterson to Dwight D. Eisenhower, November 29, 1956, White House Central Files, Official File, 1953-1961, OF 116-GG "G" Big Four Conference, Box 504, OF 116-LL, Middle East-Suez Situation Involving Israel, Egypt, Great Britain, and France (Beginning 10-29-56) (1), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>145</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower to Margaret Patterson, December 4, 1956, White House Central Files, Official File, 1953-1961, OF 116-GG "G" Big Four Conference, Box 504, OF 116-LL, Middle East-Suez Situation Involving Israel, Egypt, Great Britain, and France (Beginning 10-29-56) (1), Eisenhower Library.



world “needed oil” from the Middle East and this meant that, at times, the United States had to forgo its cultural inclinations to achieve objectives vital to national security. The Arabs had oil and the Israelis did not; these were critical factors that shaped Eisenhower’s pragmatism.

However, Eisenhower’s practical approach towards foreign policy was not limited to his efforts in the Middle East and evidence of it can be found in how his administration pursued containment in other parts of the world.

As established above, containing Soviet expansion became the centerpiece of American foreign policy during the twentieth century and efforts that advanced this cause without provoking war were pragmatic and beneficial to U.S. interests. To accomplish this, the administration occasionally employed methods that, on the surface, may have appeared as counterproductive but, when assessed in full context, they reveal Eisenhower’s *realpolitik* approach to foreign policy. An interesting conversation between Dulles and Spain’s Francisco Franco reveals on such instance.

Franco, an ardent anti-Communist, was concerned that the United States was providing aid to Communist Yugoslavia. Dulles explained that, although the United States had no “sympathy for Communism or the Communist Government which Tito headed,” this was part of a larger U.S. strategy bent on encouraging Soviet satellites to detach from Moscow, something Yugoslavia had recently done.<sup>146</sup> He elaborated by stating that, “the most promising long-term strategy for shattering the monolithic Communist structure was to encourage the governmental authorities in the Soviet satellites that they could play both sides of the street to their national

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<sup>146</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Secretary Dulles and General Franco, November 1, 1955, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memos of Conversation, General, E Through I (1), Eisenhower Library.

profit by loosening their ties with Moscow.”<sup>147</sup> Dulles conceded that the Eisenhower administration’s foreign policy was not limited by ideological constraints and, instead, was focused on defeating the Soviet Union through containment and gradual dissolution. He even went so far as to advocate that nations play the Soviet Union and the United States off each other to secure more lucrative aid packages (a position he would soon regret in his dealings with Egyptian President Nasser). This practical approach to defeating what was believed to be the United States’ greatest enemy left significant room for policy that, from an ideological perspective, was diametrically at odds with mainstream U.S. values. While dialogue like this would certainly not have gone over well in Washington, the confidential nature of the discussion permitted Dulles to divulge a unique aspect of the administration’s containment strategy, and one that betrayed the *realpolitik* often present in their foreign policy.

On occasion, Eisenhower echoed the tenets of his practical Cold War foreign policy in public. In a 1954 press conference, Eisenhower was asked about recent military aid shipments to Iraq where the government was fighting a Communist insurgency. When questioned about whether similar aid would be provided to Israel he replied that, “We are not rendering anyone assistance to start a war or to indulge in conflict with others of our friends. When we give military assistance, that is for the common purpose of opposing Communism.”<sup>148</sup> Eisenhower maintained his opposition to arms for Israel throughout his presidency while espousing a doctrine that ultimately offered military and economic assistance to Arab nations throughout the region. The reason behind this reinforces the notion that his was a foreign policy characterized

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, “The President’s News Conference,” April 29, 1954, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed August 31, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10223>.

by practical considerations for the benefit of the United States. As stated in the press conference above, the United States would provide arms and assistance to nations fighting Communism because this was beneficial to the broader policy of containment. Israel, although an ally and surrounded by enemies, was not viewed as a battleground in the Cold War and therefore, according to Eisenhower, it was neither in the United States best interests nor its duty to provide advanced weapons to Israel.

A final episode illustrates how Eisenhower's principles and pragmatism often worked in tandem to guide the administration's foreign policy. In a sensitive meeting with Rabbi Hillel Silver, Dulles and Eisenhower explained that they would not be providing additional weapons for Israel and, in a somewhat terse dismissal of the Zionist lobby, Eisenhower remarked that "he was not going to be influenced at all by political considerations and if doing what he thought right resulted in his not being elected, that would be quite agreeable to him."<sup>149</sup> Although not the news that Silver hoped to receive, the comment highlighted Eisenhower's commitment to doing what he saw as ethically right despite the domestic uproar it may cause. Later, as the President clarified the motive for his continued refusal to supply arms to Israel, the practical considerations of his foreign policy become apparent. Eisenhower described how providing weapons to Israel only undermined the U.S. objective "to exert influence throughout the area for peace, and that while we were constantly reviewing the question of defensive arms of some kind for Israel, we had not yet concluded that this would serve the interests of peace in the area."<sup>150</sup> In this private meeting, Eisenhower and Dulles laid bare their construct that U.S. objectives came first and,

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<sup>149</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between President Eisenhower, Rabbi Silver, and Secretary of State Dulles, April 26, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memos of Conversation, General, S (1), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

when pursuing these objectives, they would not be swayed by domestic politics or the Zionist lobby.

Eisenhower's foreign policy was guided by a unique combination of principled ethics and pragmatic diplomacy. In practice, this was manifest through a balance of realpolitik, advanced by Dulles, and the principled guidance Eisenhower imbued on his staff as they tackled issues at home and overseas. He was driven by a morality that emphasized doing what was right. He vowed to keep domestic politics out of international affairs and even risked losing the 1956 Presidential election by doing so. At its core, the administration united around policy that put America's interests first and ensured that ideological contests would not cloud otherwise practical foreign policy considerations. While this pragmatic approach provided a strong point of reference for both the White House and the State Department, it fell short of achieving many of the ambitious Middle East objectives outlined by Eisenhower and Dulles early in the administration. With the strife that characterized the region in 1952 still present when Eisenhower left office eight years later, it is necessary to explore the significant themes and actors that shaped the Middle East to better understand why this was the case.

### *The Middle East*

Although this essay commonly refers to the "Arab world" or the Middle East in general terms, it is important to note that the subsequent chapter focuses primarily on the United States' relationship with Egypt and Israel; their leaders, their challenges, and their objectives. This is not to suggest that the rest of the region played a negligible role in shaping U.S. policy, however, the period's defining crisis played out between these two nations and the conflict between them provides the best lens through which to view the evolution of Eisenhower's foreign policy. As tensions between Egypt and Israel steadily mounted, so too did pressure on Eisenhower and the

State Department to mitigate the impending calamity and stabilize the strategically important region. This pressure effectively stripped away the “Kabuki dance” that often clouds diplomatic posturing and, in doing, revealed the true intentions of the parties involved. To clarify, as events between Egypt and Israel threatened to draw the United States into a war involving the Soviet Union, the Eisenhower administration’s objectives, and the means they were willing to employ to accomplish those objectives, became strikingly clear.<sup>151</sup>

As noted earlier, the outcome of the 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli War left many in the region unhappy with both the United States and the former imperial powers of Western Europe. Israel, having thoroughly beaten back a combined onslaught by Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, cemented its independence while simultaneously expanding its territorial boundaries beyond the original UNSCOP partition plan. Humiliated by defeat, the Arab states were even more upset with the West for its perceived support of Israel. This animosity was compounded by a tide of anti-imperialist sentiment that gripped much of the Third World in the aftermath of World War II. Having exited Palestine in 1948, the British, whose concern over their vital link to Middle East oil was compounded by the instability of the 1948-1949 war, reinforced their military presence in Egypt by stationing an additional 80,000 soldiers in the former colony.<sup>152</sup> The Arab-Israeli war officially ended on July 20, 1949, but anti-imperialist passions and Arab-Israeli tensions meant that the next seven years were marked by border skirmishes, riots, abuses, and reprisal raids by the Israelis, Egyptians, Jordanians, Syrians, and even the British.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 206.

<sup>152</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 69.

<sup>153</sup> The *Chargé* in Israel (Russell) to the Department of State, March 18, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1489-1490.

To enforce a fragile peace, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) was established and four Mixed Armistice Commissions (MAC) were charged with observing the borders between the antagonists and diffusing disputes before they escalated to open war.<sup>154</sup> Further aggravating the situation was the disposition of nearly 750,000 Palestinian refugees who, displaced by the fighting, sought shelter in Egypt and Jordan.<sup>155</sup> The fate of these displaced persons became a point of contention in each of the peace initiatives attempted by both the Eisenhower administration and the United Nations. On top of this, the United States, England, and France were busy flexing their diplomatic muscle in the region to both increase influence and prevent Soviet infiltration.

Two key pacts shaped developments in the Middle East during the 1950s and, ironically, both were made obsolete by the Suez Crisis. The first was the Tripartite Declaration of 1950. Through it, the United States, England, and France attempted to reduce tensions between Israel and the Arab states by restricting arms sales and pledging their support to thwart any aggressive action in the region.<sup>156</sup> The Tripartite Declaration is notable because it was an attempt to foster peace through deterrence, however, in a region rife with anti-imperialist furor, it did more to stoke discord and anti-Western animosity than anything else. As a mechanism for arms control, the declaration perpetuated the three powers' reputation for paternalistic meddling in Middle East affairs, a notion echoed by Israeli Foreign Minister Walter Eytan.<sup>157</sup> In essence, if the Arabs

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<sup>154</sup> "Jordanian-Israeli General Armistice Agreement," April 3, 1949, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, accessed July 21, 2016, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/arm03.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/arm03.asp).

<sup>155</sup> United Nations, *The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem, 1917-1988*, 143.

<sup>156</sup> Statement of Policy Proposed by the National Security Council, NSC 129/1, United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Arab States and Israel, April 24, 1952, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:222-226.

<sup>157</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 74.

or Israelis wanted weapons, which they both did, they would only receive them at the behest of their former colonial rulers. If this wasn't enough, placing responsibility for the defense of the region squarely on the shoulders of the West gave them a vested interest, and thereby an active role, in influencing what may have otherwise been regional or local disputes.

The Tripartite Declaration thus became the diplomatic version of the proverbial carrot and stick; while these tools may prove exceptional for motivating livestock, the same cannot be said for fostering peace or promoting western sentiment. In the years that followed, several parties bemoaned the arms limitations imposed by the Tripartite Declaration. Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser would later reference these limitations as the primary motive behind his decision to seek Soviet weapons through the controversial 1955 Czech Arms deal; stating that he sought parity with Israel through "...the only source he could find."<sup>158</sup> In this light, the Tripartite Declaration undermined the foundational foreign policy strategy of containment by encouraging relationships between the Soviet Union and Middle East through military aid. As a source of angst, the effects of the Tripartite Declaration reverberated throughout the Middle East in the early 1950s and it ultimately failed to secure peace or defuse a regional arms race.

The second pact that shaped both the actors and the region was the 1954 Baghdad Pact. The pact, whose U.S. moniker, the Northern Tier, betrayed its intent, was the manifestation of Cold War hydraulic theory. Designed to seal off the Middle East's vulnerable northern flank from Soviet advances southward, the Baghdad Pact was a mutual defense agreement that eventually included Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and England.<sup>159</sup> Pledging mutual defense in the

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<sup>158</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, October 1, 1955, and Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, October 3, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:537-540, 551-552.

<sup>159</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 152.

event of Soviet aggression, and coordinated military preparedness to forestall such aggression, the pact appeared sound on paper but left much to be desired on the ground. According to historian Peter Hahn, the Eisenhower administration recognized that the member states did not possess the means of repelling a Soviet attack in the region and British requests for the United States to join the pact only drew attention to this shortcoming.<sup>160</sup>

More so, the pact inspired significant animosity from non-member Arab nations and Israel who saw the agreement as propping up certain states with arms and aid while those excluded were limited by the restrictions of the Tripartite Declaration. Nasser was particularly disturbed by the pact and saw it as a continued form of British imperialism and an obstacle to his pan-Arab objectives. In a discussion with CIA operative Miles Copeland he described the pact as a ploy "...to get [Arabs] to fight your enemy [Russia] while they know that if they show any intention of fighting their enemy [Israel] you will quickly stop all aid."<sup>161</sup> Nasser also saw the pact as an attempt to isolate Egypt "from other Arab states and leaving her alone facing Israel."<sup>162</sup> The pact was so detested by non-member Arab states that, in 1955, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia initiated their own mutual security agreement to off-set the Baghdad Pact. Israel too despised the Baghdad Pact and, feeling abandoned by it, sought their own "security guarantee" from the United States.<sup>163</sup> For these reasons, the Eisenhower administration ardently supported the pact behind closed doors but thought it best to voice only lukewarm support for the

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<sup>160</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 152-153.

<sup>161</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 76.

<sup>162</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, October 18, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:608-612.

<sup>163</sup> Telegram from the Department of State to the Delegation at the Foreign Ministers Meetings in Geneva, November 8, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:718-719.



accord in public and never formally enter the agreement.<sup>164</sup> Like the Tripartite Declaration, the Baghdad Pact did more to inflame tensions between the Arabs and the West than it did to defeat the Soviet invasion that never came, and nowhere were these tensions more tangible than in Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser.

*Gamal Abdel Nasser: Ambition and Suspicion*

In his July 26, 1956 speech nationalizing the Suez Canal, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser revealed much when he stated, “They strengthened Israel so that they can annihilate us and convert us into a state of refugees. We shall defend our nationalism and Arabism and we shall work so that the Arab homeland may extend from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf.”<sup>165</sup> Best known for his hardline stance against the former European imperial powers and for spreading the gospel of pan-Arabism, President Nasser gained prominence in regional politics when he and a band of disillusioned Egyptian Army officers orchestrated the 1952 coup that installed General Mohammed Naguib as the interim president. The circumstances that coalesced to propel Nasser into power warrant a description as well, for the 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli War, and the tension and strife that followed, left an indelible mark on the energetic leader and significantly shaped his worldview.

The late 1940s and early 1950s were marked by repeated and frequent skirmishes between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The humiliation of defeat left the Arabs bitter and longing for revenge while the Israelis adopted a hardline policy that each Arab incursion into their new territory would be met with an equally violent retaliatory raid. Nasser, who witnessed firsthand

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<sup>164</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Sir Harold Caccia and Secretary Dulles, December 24, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memorandums of Conversation, General, A Through D (3), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>165</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 270.

Egypt's failed excursion into Israel in 1948, was deeply humiliated by, not only this defeat, but also by the peace agreement reached at the war's conclusion, the corruption rife throughout King Farouk's government, and the stationing of 80,000 British troops in Egypt. As the 1948-1949 war gave way to low-intensity skirmishes, Egypt relied on unsanctioned guerilla style raids to wreak havoc along its border with Israel but, the Israelis employed a professional military and advanced weaponry they had received from Western allies in retaliatory raids.<sup>166</sup> This disparity infuriated Nasser and made him forever wary of Western influence in the region. Righting the perceived military imbalance between Israel and Egypt became a primary objective for him in negotiations with both East and West in the coming decade.<sup>167</sup> He was not alone in this anger and the Egyptian people became increasingly frustrated with King Farouk's ineffective leadership, seeing him as a British puppet.

Their frustrations came to a head in January 1952 when suspected Communist mobs inspired violence throughout Cairo; attacking British soldiers and ransacking both Egyptian and foreign property.<sup>168</sup> To quell the violence, Nasser and his fellow conspirators in the Free Officer Movement assumed control of the government and King Farouk was forced into exile abroad. These experiences became the impetus behind Nasser's desire to sever the paternalistic ties between England and Egypt that characterized his predecessor's regime, and to strengthen the Egyptian military to prevent a repeat of the humiliations he witnessed as a young army officer. Years later these sentiments would still ring true. In his address nationalizing the Suez Canal, it's

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<sup>166</sup> Statement of Policy by the National Security Council, NSC 5428, United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East, July 23, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:525-536.

<sup>167</sup> Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 67; Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, 30.

<sup>168</sup> Notes for Statement by the Secretary on Middle East Situation, September 28, 1956, John Foster Dulles Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (1), Eisenhower Library.

clear that Nasser saw the creation of Israel as a foothold for Western imperialism at the expense of the Arabs and this would forever impact his foreign policy decisions and worldview.

After seizing power in 1952, Nasser served as the Vice Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) established to lead the country in the aftermath of the coup. In this position, he was second only to General Naguib. However, Naguib, largely a figurehead, had little influence over government decisions and Nasser held *de facto* authority until officially elected as president in 1956. Once in office, Nasser worked hard to accelerate progress on the three primary objectives established by the RCC when it assumed power in 1952: remove British forces from Egypt, build the economy and the military, and, finally, unite the nascent Arab nations in a pan-Arab union.<sup>169</sup> Each of these objectives weighed heavily on Nasser's relationship with the United States, Israel, and the wider Middle East and they reveal a great deal about his intentions and worldview. Interestingly, the means required to accomplish them were often at odds with his ideological mooring and the tension this created further enhances our understanding of the man that proved such an obstacle to the Eisenhower administration's objectives in the region. For example, improving Egypt's economy would require him to negotiate trade deals and government projects with nations like the United States who had the capital available to invest in Egypt but, Nasser, forever wary of Western motives, often grimaced at the thought of such deals.

Above all, he sought a sovereign and independent Egypt and this, at times, left him recalcitrant when it came to forging alliances or pacts that may have advanced his domestic or

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<sup>169</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Secretary Dulles and Prime Minister Naguib, May 11, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:8-18.

regional policies.<sup>170</sup> The result was a leader reluctant to seek aid or enter agreements with other non-Arab nations, after all, his nationalization of the Suez Canal embodied the dissolution of just such an agreement. This made for slow going on a number of policy objectives but also made Nasser a national hero for appearing to throw off the yoke of the former colonial powers by charting an independent course for Egypt.<sup>171</sup> Not only did Nasser have to navigate an internal conflict between ends and means, but these objectives also placed him directly at odds with the United States and its Cold War objectives. This was especially true with regards to his efforts at building Egypt's military and economic prowess and forging a pan-Arab union under his leadership.

After months of careful negotiations, the first of Nasser's objectives became reality when the British agreed to evacuate their forces from the Suez Canal zone in 1954.<sup>172</sup> This proved to be the easiest of Nasser's three objectives with the others requiring far greater efforts. To improve his military standing, Nasser reciprocated the Eisenhower administration's outreach towards the Arabs and sought weapons from the United States in 1954. Eisenhower initially agreed and promised to deliver arms however, under pressure from the British, and realizing that increasing the number of arms in the region did little to foster peace, Ike soon reneged.<sup>173</sup> This left Nasser searching for weapons from other sources, a void the Soviet Union would readily fill a year later, and placed his military aspirations in conflict with the United States' desire to encourage peace in the region.

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<sup>170</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, March 21, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:117.

<sup>171</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 93.

<sup>172</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 179.

<sup>173</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 71.

Economically, Nasser saw the first step towards a prosperous Egypt in the construction of a dam on the Nile that would regulate seasonal flooding, increase the amount of arable farmland, provide hydroelectric power to Cairo, and stand as a monument to the power of the new Egyptian state.<sup>174</sup> Although seemingly benign, this project fell victim to Nasser's general suspicion of the West as he attempted to play off the United States against the Soviet Union in a bidding war to fund the project; thereby placing him further at odds with the Eisenhower administration.<sup>175</sup> In the meantime, as his plans for an improved economy and a strengthened military failed to materialize, Nasser held out hope that his dream of fostering a pan-Arab union was still a possibility.

Increasingly popular throughout the Arab world for his uncompromising stance with West, Nasser sought to channel this tide of support into a union stretching from the Maghreb through the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>176</sup> Nasser's vision of a pan-Arab Union with Egypt in the lead often betrayed his own grandiose sense of self. Writing in 1953, he alluded to his perceived place in the Arab world:

For some reason it seems to me that within the Arab circle there is a role, wandering aimlessly in search of a hero. And I do not know why it seems to me that this role, exhausted by its wanderings, has at last settled down, tired and weary, near the borders of our country and is beckoning to us to move... I emerge with a sense of the tremendous possibilities which we might realize through the cooperation of all these Muslims, a cooperation going not beyond the bounds of their natural loyalty to their own countries, but nonetheless enabling them and their brothers in faith to wield power wisely and without limit... And I know I go back to that wandering mission in search of a hero to play it. Here is the role.

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>175</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation between Secretary Dulles and Ambassador Hussein, July 19, 1956, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, vol. 15, *Arab-Israeli Dispute, January 1-July 26, 1956*, ed. John P. Glennon and Carl N. Rather (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 867-873.

<sup>176</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 244; Telegram from the Department of State to the Delegation at the Foreign Ministers Meetings in Geneva, November 8, 1955, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 14:718-719.

Here are the lines, and here is the stage. We alone, by virtue of our place, can perform the role.<sup>177</sup>

However, as noted above, Nasser viewed growing Western intervention in the region through vehicles like the Baghdad Pact as undermining his efforts to achieve hegemony in the Middle East. This only fueled his frustrations with the West and set him on a collision course with the Eisenhower administration's new policy in the region.

From this cursory review, it becomes clear that Nasser was a proud and ambitious leader who sought to chart a neutral course for Egypt while building his résumé as the man to unite the Arab world. His suspicions of the West and detest for colonialism left him forever searching for an alternative to U.S. support and largely immune to Western influence.<sup>178</sup> It also prompted diplomatic cautiousness as he often sensed conspiracies entwined in every treaty, pact, and agreement. Finally, the humiliation he experienced as a young army officer in the first Arab-Israeli war left Nasser with deep animosity towards Israel and this motivated him to strengthen Egypt's economy and national defense to prevent future embarrassments. This final point, Egyptian-Israeli relations, grew increasingly strained throughout Nasser's tenure and the election of David Ben-Gurion to Prime Minister in 1955 only exacerbated an already fragile relationship.

#### *Israel: Anxiety and Aggression*

Israel, although victorious in the 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli War, emerged from the conflict aware of the precarious position it occupied in the region while also recognizing the rewards of successful military action. The tiny nation of 600,000 defeated a combined onslaught from a much larger coalition and increased its territory by thirty percent beyond that allotted it under the United Nations partition plan. In addition to this, by way of Palestinian exodus, Israel became a

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<sup>177</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 124.

<sup>178</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 57.

predominately Jewish state almost overnight.<sup>179</sup> However, this victory placed the Israelis in an interesting paradox and fueled a foreign policy bent on perpetuating two contradictory notions of their place in the region. On the one hand, their relatively small population and geographic location virtually surrounded by sworn enemies meant that, when engaging with the West, the Israelis portrayed their position as weak and teetering on the verge of collapse at any moment. The Israelis often adopted this tone when attempting to secure military aid from the West.

While requests for aid were numerous and repetitive, a letter from the Israeli ambassador to the influential Arthur Dean provides a prime example of this doomsday pandering. Arguing that both Canada and France failed to provide sufficient numbers of military aircraft to Israel, Ambassador Eban wrote, “We are thus “stuck” with 24 first line aircraft against 250 and the objective defined by the Secretary of helping us reach a better posture by mid-summer is not in sight. This is very grave indeed, and we shall be asking the United States to help us find a way out.”<sup>180</sup> Dulles recognized this theme in a candid conversation with the Lebanese ambassador amidst ongoing Baghdad Pact developments. He described Israel as “constantly stressing its isolation, and the fact that it alone has no security guarantees...”<sup>181</sup> In a 1955 message to Moshe Sharett, Dulles assured the Israeli Prime Minister that he understood “Israel’s sense of isolation and insecurity,” and that the problem has had his “personal attention.”<sup>182</sup> To the West, Israel

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<sup>179</sup> Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>180</sup> Letter from Ambassador Abba Eban to Arthur Dean, May 25, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (2), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>181</sup> Memorandum of Conversation Between Dr. Charles Malik, Ambassador of Lebanon and Secretary of State Dulles, February 9, 1955, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memos of Conversation – General – L Through M (2), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>182</sup> Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, February 14, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:55-56.

conveyed a sense of helplessness, barely surviving under the constant threat of destruction from its neighbors, yet, to the Arab world, it could never betray even the slightest vulnerability.

According to historian Michael Oren, the combination of surviving the Holocaust, achieving victory in the 1948-1949 war, and facing persecution from hostile neighbors inspired “an ambivalence within the Israelis: an overblown confidence in their invincibility alongside an equally inflated sense of doom.”<sup>183</sup> To demonstrate their perceived invincibility, the Israelis adopted an aggressive policy along their border aimed at both preserving the territorial gains made during the earlier war and deterring Arab aggression by appearing stronger and more menacing than they actually were. This policy led to such inflammatory acts as a February 1955 raid by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) on an Egyptian army outpost in Gaza, and a December assault on Syrian forces north of Lake Tiberias that resulted in the death or capture of eighty-four soldiers.<sup>184</sup> In response, Dulles came down hard on Israel and was quick to point out that its policy “works clearly and progressively against her own interests.”<sup>185</sup> This was by no means an effort to play politics with the issue or bluster Israel into backing down. Instead, internal memorandums reveal that the Eisenhower administration saw Israel’s continuing aggression as a testament to its military superiority over its Arab neighbors and, for that reason, they had no need for additional arms from the United States.<sup>186</sup> Eisenhower and Dulles saw through the Israeli claims of weakness and, in this case, actions spoke much louder than words. But, just as Israel was stuck finding its way amidst a U.S. policy that sought to place distance between Jerusalem

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<sup>183</sup> Oren, *Six Days of War*, 6.

<sup>184</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, March 1, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:73-74; Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 163-167.

<sup>185</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 164.

<sup>186</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Secretary Dulles and Members of Congress, United States Policy Towards Israel, April 23, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (2), Eisenhower Library.



and Washington, the Eisenhower administration had to navigate relations with two very different Israeli Prime Ministers.

For the first decade of its existence, Israel was led by two men: David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett. Upon declaring statehood in 1948, David Ben-Gurion assumed duties as Prime Minister and Moshe Sharett occupied the post of Foreign Minister. Chaim Weizmann served in the largely titular role of President.<sup>187</sup> For the bulk of the period under review in this essay Ben-Gurion served as Prime Minister (May 1948 – December 1953 and November 1955 – June 1963) with Sharett occupying the post during his absence (December 1953 – November 1955).<sup>188</sup> During his tenure as Prime Minister, Sharett was dual-hatted and maintained his responsibilities as Foreign Minister.<sup>189</sup> These two leaders were responsible for the development and execution of Israel's foundational foreign policy and, although they worked closely and knew each other well, the differences that distinguish their administrations influenced how Eisenhower and the State Department approached efforts in the Middle East. Because of this, a brief overview of their worldview and ideology is necessary.

David Ben-Gurion was born in Poland but immigrated to Palestine in 1906.<sup>190</sup> Under both the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent British Mandate he worked closely with the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency for Palestine to coordinate and settle Jewish immigrants in the territory. As World War II came to a close, Ben-Gurion adopted a militant version of Zionism and, in response to British attempts at curbing Jewish immigration to Palestine, he encouraged acts of sabotage against British infrastructure.<sup>191</sup> His radical Zionism

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<sup>187</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 49.

<sup>188</sup> Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, 29.

<sup>189</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 176.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

seemed to escalate as his dream of achieving a Jewish state in Palestine grew closer to a reality, and it was enough to shock even the most committed Zionists working with him towards that goal. Describing a visit from Ben-Gurion during the 1948-1949 war, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, at the time serving as commander of the Harel Brigade, recounted Ben-Gurion's harsh instructions for handling a group of Palestinian civilians who refused to leave after the IDF occupied the territory that surrounded their homes:

We walked outside, Ben-Gurion accompanying us. Alton repeated his question: 'What is to be done with the population?' B.G. [Ben-Gurion] waved his hand in a gesture which said, 'Drive them out!'... 'Driving out' is a term with a harsh ring. Psychologically, this was one of the most difficult actions we undertook. The population of Lod did not leave willingly. There was no way of avoiding the use of force and warning shots in order to make the inhabitants march the 10 to 15 miles to the point where they met up with the legion.<sup>192</sup>

As evidenced by this account, Ben-Gurion's hardline position on the fate of the Palestinians was enough to disturb even the soldiers fighting for the young nation's survival.

The reputation for radical Zionism and militant expansionism that Ben-Gurion cultivated during the mandate period and the 1948-1949 war stuck with him throughout his terms as prime minister and Nasser, Eisenhower, and Dulles all viewed him as a foreign policy hawk.<sup>193</sup> At the root of Ben-Gurion's hawkishness was his desire for land and a reluctance to cede any territory Israel had gained in the 1948-1949 war to its Arab neighbors.<sup>194</sup> Ben-Gurion reasoned that this territory was necessary if Israel were to absorb the millions of Jews worldwide as they immigrated from the diaspora. He codified his harsh policy towards the Arabs as prime minister and a 1953 State Department assessment identified him as instigating much of the animosity in

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<sup>192</sup> David K. Shipler, "Israel Bars Rabin from Relating '48 Eviction of Arabs," *The New York Times*, October 23, 1979.

<sup>193</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 82; Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 74; Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 176.

<sup>194</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 155, 186, 263.

the region. The paper referenced several unprovoked actions by Israel; including the murder of Arab refugees in Gaza, the shooting of Bedouins and their flocks in the demilitarized zone, and a particularly brazen assault on the Jordanian village of Qibya. The paper identified Ben-Gurion as the chief antagonist responsible for fomenting discord with his Arab neighbors, pointing to remarks he made in the wake of the Qibya raid as particularly vituperative. In summarizing Israel's aggressive policy towards its neighbors the assessment read, "Israel[s] policy has served counter to United States endeavors to stabilize conditions in the area. Believing implicitly in the justice of their own cause, the Israelis appear unable to show the realism required for a successful adjustment into the Near Eastern environment."<sup>195</sup>

On Egypt, the state department quickly learned that Ben-Gurion was not inclined to negotiate or compromise. In a 1951 statement to the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Monnet Davis, Ben-Gurion proclaimed that the Egyptians "simply did not belong to the 'free world.'"<sup>196</sup> But, his antipathy towards Egypt did not stop with rhetoric. Immediately after occupying the post of prime minister for his second term on November 2, 1955, dialogue in diplomatic circles indicated that Ben-Gurion's government was preparing for a preventive war that "has as its objective [the] overthrow of Nasser regime."<sup>197</sup> Less than a year later these grumblings became reality when, with the Suez Crisis, Ben-Gurion found his justification for invading Egypt. Ben-Gurion was not making it easy for U.S. diplomats to calm the rough waters of the Middle East but, for a moment, they believed they saw an opportunity in his successor, Moshe Sharett.

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<sup>195</sup> Paper Prepared in the Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs, Trends in Israel Policy Toward the Arabs, November 10, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1407-1409.

<sup>196</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 77.

<sup>197</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation between Secretary of State Dulles and Foreign Minister Molotov, October 31, 1955, and Telegram from the Delegation at the Foreign Ministers Meetings to the Department of State, November 10, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:689, 727-728.

Although only serving as Prime Minister for a little less than two years, the Eisenhower administration was optimistic that Moshe Sharett offered the best chance for peace with the Arabs since Israel declared statehood six years earlier. Sharett and Ben-Gurion's relationship dated back to their time working together with the Jewish Agency for Palestine and the two shared the common vision of Israel as an independent and secure refuge for Jews of the diaspora.<sup>198</sup> They also believed that their nation was surrounded by sworn enemies and they both refused to cede "a single inch of our land."<sup>199</sup> However, this did not mean that the two saw eye to eye on how to best mitigate Israel's precarious situation in the region and their administrations pursued different means of achieving a shared vision. A message to the State Department from the *chargé d'affaires* in Israel following the ambush of an Israeli passenger bus by Jordanian guerrillas captured the differences between the two prime ministers. In it, Francis Russell stated:

Israeli government and public fundamentally divided between policy of forcefully demonstrating Israel strength and determination at this time and policy of restraint enunciated by Sharett in speech three days ago... Bus ambush will undoubtedly be exploited by Lavon-Dayan element (undoubtedly in close touch with Ben-Gurion) to create support for present show of strength by Israel.<sup>200</sup>

In his dispatch, Russell linked Sharett to a "policy of restraint" as opposed to the more hawkish politics of his predecessor, Ben-Gurion, who still occupied a seat in the Knesset. With his five-year tenure as foreign minister leaving a lasting impact on him, Sharett was much more comfortable relying on diplomacy than his predecessor. Years spent travelling abroad and working with various heads of state helped him establish a vast network of political connections that he readily employed to promote Israeli policy. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the

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<sup>198</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 54.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 102, 263.

<sup>200</sup> The *Chargé* in Israel (Russell) to the Department of State, March 19, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1491-1492.

United States. Here, Sharett worked hard with Israel's ambassador, Abba Eban, and utilized the Zionist lobby to cultivate relationships with both Congress and the State Department on behalf of Israel.<sup>201</sup> While his efforts yielded mixed results, they did have an impact in diplomatic circles and, in Washington, Sharett was largely seen as someone the United States could work with.

The belief that Sharett was a moderate who was willing to compromise on efforts geared towards settlement with the Arabs was prevalent throughout the State Department. This belief grew out of Sharett's restraint with regards to reprisal operations and his willingness to curtail the IDF's cross-border excursions. In the same dispatch he sent following the bus ambush in the Negev, Ambassador Russell urged the State Department to continue "strengthening" Sharett as his moderate position was conducive to U.S. efforts in the region.<sup>202</sup> Dulles shared this view and in a personal message to Sharett the following year he thanked the Prime Minister for his "policy of moderation" and reassured him of U.S. support for his government.<sup>203</sup> Dulles later remarked to the Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyachelsav Molotov, that "Sharett represented the more moderate elements who were opposed to a preventive war."<sup>204</sup> Special Representative Eric Johnston, tasked by President Eisenhower with brokering an agreement between Jordan, Syria, and Israel over water usage rights in the Jordan River Valley, echoed a positive impression of Sharett as moderate and willing to compromise. Although his mission ultimately failed, in his report back to the State Department on talks with Israel, Johnston described Sharett as favoring

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<sup>201</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 58-59, 73.

<sup>202</sup> The *Chargé* in Israel (Russell) to the Department of State, March 19, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1491-1492.

<sup>203</sup> Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, February 14, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:55-56.

<sup>204</sup> Memorandum of Conversation with Foreign Minister Molotov, October 31, 1955, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memos of Conversation - General - L Through M (4), Eisenhower Library.

the draft resolution on the Jordan Valley plan but unable to agree to it due to “internal political problems” and a fear of being characterized as weak.<sup>205</sup>

However, the sliver of hope that the State Department saw in Sharett was enough to spur the administration to attempt its boldest push for peace yet: Operation Alpha. While the details behind Operation Alpha will be covered in the subsequent chapter, it is important to recognize that the plan for peace between Egypt and Israel was timed to capitalize on the Sharett government’s lean towards moderation. Fearing the rhetoric of the upcoming campaign season, the embassy in Tel Aviv urged the State Department to be mindful of when they launched the effort.<sup>206</sup> In the end, the 1955 election would not go in Sharett’s favor as internal opposition to his policy of moderation steadily mounted. In response to the above message of support from Dulles, Sharett pointed to recent border disputes with Syria as placing him “under considerable pressure...and the Israeli public is asking the government whether it is not time to ‘give the Syrians a lesson.’”<sup>207</sup> It appears Sharett realized his fate and the 1955 election became a referendum on whether to continue on a path of moderation or return to the more hawkish and militant foreign policy espoused by Ben-Gurion. The Israelis opted for the latter and Ben-Gurion returned to office in November 1955.

Between these two leaders Israel in the 1950s advanced a foreign policy aimed at enhancing its military capabilities and securing its territorial accessions. Behind this policy lay the state’s founding purpose - to serve as a national home for the world’s Jewish population. In

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<sup>205</sup> Telegram from Ambassador Eric Johnston to the Department of State, February 24, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:68-69.

<sup>206</sup> Despatch from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, January 7, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:5-7.

<sup>207</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, February 17, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:63-65.

its relations with the West, this policy took the form of alarmist pleas for additional aid and a hardline stance against the Arab states arrayed around it. In the Middle East, Israel relied on an aggressive policy consisting of cross-border raids and retaliatory strikes to portray an image of invincibility and strength. The evolution of this strategy can be seen in the 1956 Suez Crisis where Israel, in collusion with England and France, struck preemptively against Egypt to thwart a perceived threat to its national security. Despite continuing cries for military aid and assistance, Eisenhower and Dulles saw through the Israeli façade and, instead of strengthening the nation militarily, they focused their energy on fostering peace in the region. Seeing potential for peace during Moshe Sharett's term as Prime Minister, the administration redoubled their efforts with Operation Alpha only to come up short when Ben-Gurion began preparing the nation for war in 1956. From this cursory review, Israel's foreign policy is best characterized as both anxious and aggressive. The young nation undoubtedly occupied a precarious position in the region and its leaders, fearful of appearing weak on national security, ensured that they often played the role of antagonist among their neighbors. When this policy collided with Egypt's ambitions under Nasser it sent the Eisenhower administration into overdrive to secure peace and prevent a rout by the Soviets.

### *Conclusion*

The 1950s marked the opening sprint in a competitive and constantly evolving scramble for influence between the United States and the Soviet Union. But, the two were not the only participants in this high-stake race and the track was crowded with new players vigorously pursuing their own interests and objectives. Believing the Soviets were making strides around the world, Eisenhower and Dulles set out to orchestrate a practical foreign policy that mitigated the harshness of realpolitik by remaining grounded in principled decision making. This unique

approach often won them praise among the emerging Third World and serves as one of the few examples when principles and pragmatism were relatively congruent. However, neither Eisenhower's principles nor his practical foreign policy were enough to fully realize the multitude of ambitious objectives he and Dulles had in mind in the Middle East. Here, they attempted to navigate a centuries old feud that was recently reinvigorated by new leaders with growing ambitions.

In Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser's suspicion of the West, his vision of an Egyptian led pan-Arab union, and his steadfastness in refusing to acquiesce to the state of Israel served as obstacles to the administration's efforts in the region. Not only was Nasser wary of the West, but he also viewed his neighbors with uncertainty and saw their entry into defense agreements, like the Baghdad Pact, as a threat to his regional hegemony. To assume the mantle as leader of the Arab world, he sought to undo the vestiges of colonialism that remained in Egypt and then build the nation's economic and military strength to prevent a repeat of the humiliation he experienced during the 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli War. This set him on a collision course with the West that culminated in his nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956.

Unlike their neighbor to the south, Israel in the 1950s was less suspicious and more anxious about the direction of U.S. policy under Eisenhower. Under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett, Israel pursued an aggressive policy of retaliation in the series of cross-border skirmishes that characterized its relationship with its neighbors during the first half of the decade. This was part of a strategy bent on projecting an image of invincibility in the face of a numerically superior foe, however, it aggravated Israel's relationship with the United States and both Eisenhower and Dulles lamented the instability it wrought. Despite this, the administration maintained its relationship with Israel and watched its leaders closely for signs



that conditions were conducive for peace. Unfortunately, with the hawkish Ben-Gurion returning to office in 1955, Israeli aggression continued to escalate and, with some coaxing from England and France, reached a climax when Israel invaded Egypt in 1956.

## CHAPTER 3

## PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

Arab-Israel difference and the part played by the United States in the establishment and support of Israel contribute very substantially to continued and increasing anti-American and anti-Western sentiment in the Arab world... To date, however, the American partnership with Israel has been a lopsided arrangement, with the United States giving massive aid and support while receiving little or nothing in return.<sup>208</sup>

State Department Position Paper  
May 7, 1953

If President Truman's initial position on Palestine has been summarized by historians as vacillating and reactionary, the same cannot be said for his successor Dwight Eisenhower.<sup>209</sup> When reviewing U.S. policy during this era the sharp contrast between the two presidents becomes strikingly clear. Although Truman's decision had far reaching and dramatic consequences for U.S. foreign policy, it was largely reactionary in nature; after all, Truman did not create Israel, he simply recognized it and normalized U.S. relations with it in the aftermath of the 1948-1949 war. Eisenhower, on the other hand, understood early in his presidency that a decisive pivot towards the Arab states was urgently needed if the United States was going to achieve the Cold War objectives that had drawn it into the Middle East in the first place.

Like many policy initiatives, Eisenhower's emphasis on the Middle East grew out of a problem. Believing that U.S. influence had been degraded by its association with Israel, the Eisenhower administration identified the first step towards improved relations lie in remedying the many Arab-Israeli conflicts that continually threatened to further destabilize the region. NSC

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<sup>208</sup> Department of State Position Paper (STA D-1/4), May 7, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1215-1218.

<sup>209</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 42-43; Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 48-49.

129/1, published in April of 1952, described the problem and suggested a new course for the administration:

The United States should utilize all feasible and appropriate means to resolve the issues which prevent the abatement of Arab distrust of Israel and resulting animosity toward the United States. To this end the United States should promote and encourage, without partiality as between Israel and the several Arab states... Settlement of local Arab-Israeli disputes, such as boundary problems, questions of water rights, and establishment of financial and economic arrangements between Israel and the Arab States.<sup>210</sup>

Dulles echoed a similar sentiment and declared that the administration's problem with the Middle East stemmed from Truman's decision to recognize, and thereby legitimize, Israel:

We are in the present jam because the past Administration had always dealt with the area from a political standpoint and had tried to meet the wishes of the Zionists in this country and that had created a basic antagonism with the Arabs. That was what the Russians were now capitalizing on. I said I thought it of the utmost importance for the welfare of the United States that we should get away from a political basis and try to develop a national non-partisan policy.<sup>211</sup>

Others in the administration echoed similar concerns. Henry Byroade, U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, believed that U.S.-Israeli relations alienated nationalist leaders like Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and this drove them to look towards the Soviet Union for support.<sup>212</sup> Dulles diagnosed this same dilemma after visiting the region in 1953. "Arabs believed that the U.S. will back the new state of Israel in aggressive expansion. Our basic political problem," Dulles declared, "is to improve the Moslem states' attitude toward western democracies because our prestige in that area had been in constant decline ever since the war."<sup>213</sup> From Eisenhower's

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<sup>210</sup> Statement of Policy Proposed by the National Security Council (NSC 129/1), United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to The Arab States and Israel, April 24, 1952, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:222-226.

<sup>211</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation with the Secretary of State, October 18, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:612.

<sup>212</sup> Telegram from Henry A. Byroade, United States Ambassador to Egypt, to Department of State, June 9, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:237-240.

<sup>213</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 43.

perspective, Truman could not have chosen a more unpopular bedfellow for the United States and now he was stuck with navigating the complex world of Middle East affairs with the specter of Israel and Zionism tied to his every move.<sup>214</sup> The situation was so frustrating that, in reference to U.S. attempts to foster Arab-Israeli peace, Eisenhower bemoaned that he “be allowed to be friends of both sides – but that there has been that flaming antagonism.”<sup>215</sup> “That flaming antagonism” the President referred to was the scorn garnered from the Arab world since the United States had, in their eyes, aligned with Israel vis-à-vis the concerns of the Arab states.

Desperate to improve U.S. prospects in the region, Eisenhower sought to recast the United States as an unbiased broker of Middle East disputes whose primary goal was promoting regional stability and containing Soviet expansion. This results oriented policy attempted to place U.S. Cold War interests above domestic politics and, by adopting an impartial stance in the region, the administration hoped they could foster a spirit of compromise amongst the feuding parties – principally Egypt and Israel. In keeping with this spirit, Eisenhower repeatedly vowed that he would not allow the Zionist lobby or special interests to color his administration’s policy in the region.<sup>216</sup> He maintained that he would keep the 1956 presidential election out of his administration’s handling of Middle East affairs.<sup>217</sup> While President Truman may have made such claims, his actions fell far short in this arena.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 54.

<sup>215</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 186.

<sup>216</sup> Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, 44.

<sup>217</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between President Eisenhower and President Nasser, September 26, 1960, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960*, vol. 13, *Arab-Israeli Dispute; United Arab Republic; North Africa*, ed. John P. Glennon, Suzanne E. Coffman, and Charles S. Sampson (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 602.

<sup>218</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 18-19.

Eisenhower, on the other hand, committed to keeping domestic politics and Zionism out of U.S. policy making – even in an election year. In a move that garnered significant disdain at home, he demonstrated his commitment to impartiality by openly supporting U.N. efforts against some of the United States’ closest allies during the 1956 Suez Crisis.<sup>219</sup> Despite this effort, the numerous U.S. peace initiatives in the region met with increased animosity from Arab and Jew alike.<sup>220</sup> All the while, the Soviet Union appeared to be making inroads with key strategic players in the region. Had George Kennan, Edward Stettinius, and George Marshall’s concerns become reality? Was the United States’ relationship with Israel adversely impacting its influence in the region and jeopardizing its wider interests with regards to containing Communism? Eisenhower and Dulles certainly believed this and, even before the Suez Crisis elevated the regional conflict to the brink of world war, they set out to remedy the situation by brokering a settlement between Egypt and Israel.<sup>221</sup> Acknowledging that U.S. nuclear might was no longer a foreign policy cure-all for perceived Communist aggression, he attempted a costly policy of economic aid to assuage Arab distaste for U.S.-Israeli relations and stymie Soviet efforts in the region. This policy, both the lead up to it and its zenith in the Eisenhower Doctrine, highlights the sharp conflict of interests inherent in Truman’s 1948 decision and America’s wider Cold War objectives in the Middle East.

Unlike the confluence of events that drove Truman to recognize Israel, the evolution of the Eisenhower Doctrine was a lineal progression, born out of an attempt to improve U.S. influence in the region and contain the spread of Communism without abandoning the fledgling

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<sup>219</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 204.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-190.

<sup>221</sup> Memorandum from Francis H. Russell to the Secretary of State, Summary Statement of Alpha Proposals, May 18, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:200-205.

state of Israel. Under Eisenhower, the United States' problem with Israel and the Arab world escalated in three phases: from the intangible loss of prestige, to a tangible arms race, and, finally, to an outright physical attack on U.S. interests.

The intangible phase of this progression grew out of a reported decline in U.S. prestige and influence that sent worries through the State Department and prompted Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Mutual Security Administrator Harold Stassen to spend three weeks in May of 1953 visiting the region.<sup>222</sup> Months later, a State Department report titled "Reported Decline in US Prestige Abroad," identified the source of declining U.S. influence as stemming from U.S. support for Israel. The report noted that "Prior to and following the establishment of the state of Israel and the ensuing Palestine War of 1948, in which the Israelis soundly defeated the Arab armies, American prestige reached an extreme low throughout the Arab world. Since that time, American support for Israel has continuously irritated Egypt, Lebanon, and the other Arab nations."<sup>223</sup> As described earlier, the State Department viewed the instability caused by ethno-religious conflicts like that between the Muslims and Jews as providing fertile ground for Communist advances.<sup>224</sup> Soon, their worst fears seemed to be coming true.

The second, tangible phase of the problem occurred in September of 1955 when a Czech-Egyptian arms deal posed a serious threat to American interests by giving the Soviets increased

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<sup>222</sup> The Visit of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Mutual Security Administrator Harold Stassen to the Near and Middle East, May 9-29, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1.

<sup>223</sup> Special Report Prepared by the Psychological Strategy Board, September 11, 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954, vol. 1, part 2, *General: Economic and Political Matters (in two parts)*, eds. William Z. Slany, David M. Baehler, Herbert A. Fine, Ralph R. Goodwin, N. Stephen Kane, Ronald D. Landa, Lisle A. Rose, William F. Sanford, Jr., and Ilana Stern (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 1480-1525.

<sup>224</sup> Statement of Policy by the National Security Council, NSC 5428, United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East, July 23, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:525-536.

leverage and upsetting the balance of power in the region.<sup>225</sup> Finally, Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, and the ensuing Suez Crisis, marked the manifestation of the Eisenhower administration's worst fears in the region; a conflict pitting NATO members against Soviet supported states that threatened, not only the further degradation of U.S. influence but, world war. NSC 5428, published two years before the Suez Crisis, warned of the risks to U.S. interests if Israel initiated war with its Arab neighbors, "Should Israeli aggression occur and the Western Powers fail to restore the situation, a decisive movement of the area away from the West and possibly into the Soviet sphere of influence must be anticipated."<sup>226</sup> Not until the problem escalated to this final phase did Eisenhower and Dulles realize that, to salvage America's position in the region, they had to jettison their demands for settlement between Israel and its neighbors and, instead, adopt a realpolitik approach to Middle East policy.

In sum, the United States' problem in the Middle East progressed from perception to reality between 1952 and 1956. To mitigate this, the administration's response evolved from overt settlement projects, to covert peace missions, and, lastly, to desperation diplomacy centered on purchasing influence.<sup>227</sup> This balancing act required the expenditure of massive amounts of financial aid and diplomatic energy and, despite this, it yielded relatively little.<sup>228</sup> That said, the doctrine set in motion a policy precedent for U.S. involvement in the region that spanned the second half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>225</sup> Address by John Foster Dulles Before the United Nations General Assembly, September 19, 1957, John Foster Dulles Papers, 1951-1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memos of Conversation – General – S(2), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>226</sup> Statement of Policy by the National Security Council, United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East, July 23, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:525-536.

<sup>227</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 265.

<sup>228</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 175.

### *Historiography*

Three schools of thought emerge when examining how historians and political scientists have treated Eisenhower's intervention in the Middle East. While each of them generally agree that the culmination of his intervention, the Eisenhower Doctrine, was a failure, they differ on etiological grounds. The first suggests that Eisenhower failed in the Middle East because the neutral path he pursued between Arab and Jew ultimately negated gains with either party. This is the crux of Steven Spiegel's argument when he writes, "By attempting to maneuver between the conflicting interests of Egypt, Israel, Britain, and France, the administration had alienated all of them...the administration was unable to devise policies to please any party concerned."<sup>229</sup> Although he credits Eisenhower with developing America's first coherent policy in the region, he points to the administration's attempts at playing all sides as ultimately undermining the effectiveness of their efforts. He also critiques the rigid, "one-dimensional nature of Eisenhower's policy making" as preventing the administration from attempting anything other than forcing peace plans at the opposing parties.<sup>230</sup> Spiegel identifies Eisenhower and Dulles' close relationship as the root of this problem and, in a reversal of the conflict that befuddled President Truman, claims that the uncontested dialogue between the State Department and the White House prevented the latter from attempting an alternative to its policy of impartiality.

The second school of thought blames a misdiagnosis of the prestige problem for the Eisenhower Doctrine's ultimate failure. In *Doomed to Succeed*, Dennis Ross posits that inter-Arab rivalries, and not the United States' relationship with Israel, led to the demise of the Eisenhower Doctrine. In making this claim he points to various interventions the administration

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<sup>229</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 92-93.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.



made to either support or destabilize Arab leaders in the region including; revoking the offer to finance the Aswan Dam, CIA meddling in Syria, and, the climax of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the landing of U.S. combat troops in Lebanon.<sup>231</sup> According to Ross, shifting support between the competing actors in the region only increased tensions and further destabilized the area in the eyes of the monarchs and nationalists vying for power in the Arab world. When the United States threw its support behind one leader, it angered the others. Ross argues that, “while all such efforts failed, we remained riveted on Israel as the cause of our problems in the Middle East. We did not look at the inter-Arab rivalry as something that determined the priorities of individual Arab leaders.”<sup>232</sup> By failing to diagnose the source of Arab hostility, Ross concludes that the Eisenhower administration wasted its time and energy on a secondary issue that bore little significance on the Cold War orientation of the Arab states. Israel played only a negligible role in Ross’ assessment of Eisenhower’s efforts in the Middle East; “Their [Arab] preoccupation with survival and security meant those Arab leaders who depended on us for their protection would seek more from us regardless of our ties to Israel.”<sup>233</sup> While inter-Arab rivalries undoubtedly complicated the Eisenhower administration’s policy in the Middle East, negating the impact of America’s relationship with Israel is an oversimplification of an incredibly complex foreign policy issue. As noted earlier, treaties like the Baghdad Pact inflamed tensions across the Arab world and did more harm than good in advancing U.S. interests, but Zionism and the United States’ relationship with Israel made Arab leaders question U.S. motives and loyalties. This made Eisenhower and Dulles’ efforts that much more difficult and ultimately led

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<sup>231</sup> Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, 32, 39-40.

<sup>232</sup> Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, 48.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

to their failure. Tackling the multilateral ramifications of America's bilateral relationship with Israel is the approach advanced by Peter Hahn.

The third school of thought regarding the failures of Eisenhower's Middle East policy acknowledges factors highlighted in the first two but posits that an additional issue frustrated Washington's plans for the region. This third approach, although cumbersome in both breadth and depth, presents the most accurate explanation for the Eisenhower administration's shortcomings. In his comprehensive examination of the Truman and Eisenhower administration's efforts in the region, Peter Hahn recognizes that inter-Arab rivalries and the policy of impartiality made it difficult for the administration to find a solution that pleased all parties involved.<sup>234</sup> However, he argues that a third element, U.S.-Israeli relations, ultimately soured the administration's overtures to the Arabs.

He posits that the Eisenhower administration misdiagnosed the Arab states' priorities and failed to address what they saw as the primary threat to their national interest. While Eisenhower and Dulles saw the Soviet Union as the greatest danger to the region, the Arab leaders viewed Israel and each other as the real dangers. By focusing on the Cold War threat Hahn argues that the Eisenhower administration did more to foment Arab-Israeli unrest than foster a lasting peace.<sup>235</sup> Describing the Middle East in the 1950s as facing its own version of the Cold War, he contends that U.S.-Israeli relations fostered distrust among Arab leaders who were in competition first with Israel and, second, with each other.<sup>236</sup> Trusting an ally like the United States, who was simultaneously working and sharing intelligence with your perceived enemy, Israel, meant that interactions were always measured, cautious, and skeptical; never yielding the

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<sup>234</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 275.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

firm commitments sought by the Eisenhower administration. Hahn also addresses this from the Israeli perspective by arguing that a general “warming” to the Arab states and a decline in support from the U.S. only angered Israel who felt threatened, not by Communists but, by their neighbors.<sup>237</sup> Because of this, Hahn argues that the Israelis were more inclined to use military operations than diplomacy as a means of deterring their neighbors.

This framework most accurately describes the reasons behind Eisenhower’s failure because it addresses the psychological, cultural (anti-Zionist/anti-Arab), and political shortcomings that plagued the administration from its earliest forays in the region. Had the administration more effectively distanced itself from Israel more substantial gains with the Arabs may have been possible, but this was a relationship that Eisenhower and Dulles never meant to sever, only to reign in. Combining the detrimental effects of inter-Arab rivalries, anti-Zionist and anti-American sentiment, and the untrustworthy nature an ally who was involved with all interested parties, this third school of thought presents a comprehensive assessment of the Eisenhower administration’s failure in the Middle East. Accepting Hahn’s approach as sound, it is now possible to explore what America’s relationship with Israel cost in both diplomatic energy and fiscal aid.

#### *The Loss of Prestige and the Jordan Valley Project*

As noted above, the Eisenhower administration’s foray into the Middle East was driven by a problem, namely, the loss of prestige and U.S. influence in the region. The belief that the United States’ relationship with Israel had led to a decline in U.S. influence in the greater Middle East was pervasive throughout the State Department during the Eisenhower years. Reflecting on the source of the problem in a meeting with key senators and members of the State Department,

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<sup>237</sup> Peter L. Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 288.

Dulles remarked, “The Arabs have felt that they could not depend on the U.S. in view of Zionist pressures which can be brought to bear in this country.”<sup>238</sup> Dulles’ comment pointed to the psychological impact that U.S. relations with Israel had on the Arab psyche and, in multilateral affairs, this lack of dependability undermined the U.S. capacity to project influence among the Arab states. The first approach the Eisenhower administration took to remedy their dependability problem focused on demonstrating that the United States could be counted on as an objective broker of disputes between Israel and its neighbors. An opportunity to do so presented itself early in Eisenhower’s first term when a dispute between Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Israel over water usage rights threatened to further destabilize the region. In an audacious attempt at shuttle diplomacy, one man was charged with negotiating the contentious issue of how the desert’s most precious resource, water, should be shared between sworn enemies and regional rivals. This marked the beginning of the Eisenhower administration’s policy of dedicating increasing amounts of diplomatic energy and fiscal aid to the region in a bid to improve its influence and off-set its unpopular relationship with Israel.

On October 7, 1953 Eisenhower appointed Eric Johnston as his Personal Representative and Ambassador to the Near East. In the official appointment letter Eisenhower charged Johnston with the vague and deceptively innocuous task of, “resolve[ing] certain problems affecting the Near East.”<sup>239</sup> More information followed six days later and Johnston soon learned how complex and challenging his mission would be. But, in selecting Johnston, Eisenhower believed he had the right man for the job.

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<sup>238</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, April 23, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (2), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>239</sup> President Dwight Eisenhower Letter to Eric Johnston, October 7, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1348n.

Johnston was the epitome of a self-made man who, after his father died at age six, began working as a paperboy to help his mother make ends meet.<sup>240</sup> Johnston's public service career began after college when, instead of using his law degree, World War I prompted him to join the Marine Corps. Upon returning from the war he built a successful manufacturing company and worked his way through the Chamber of Commerce to eventually become the organization's national president.<sup>241</sup> He understood the importance of compromise and, as a Republican, served in appointed positions under both Roosevelt and Truman. Johnston gained his earliest diplomatic experience in the Roosevelt administration when, in 1943, he travelled through Latin America priming the region for enhanced trade with the United States after the war.<sup>242</sup> Earning his bona fides as a pragmatist, Johnston went so far as to meet with Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin in late 1944 to promote the United States film industry in Russia. With such a pedigree, it's obvious why Eisenhower and Dulles pinned their policy hopes on Johnston but, despite his previous experience negotiating with discordant parties, after two years in the Middle East, he was still without a resolution on the water dispute. Although his mission ultimately ended in failure, his endeavor remains central to the argument presented in this essay because it marked the Eisenhower administration's first attempt to undo the foreign policy damage done by President Truman's decision to associate the United States with Israel. It also revealed the lengths, both in energy and treasure, that the administration was willing to go to secure peace between Arab and Jew to thwart perceived Soviet gains.

Johnston was tasked with solving a complex and multifaceted problem that reached its zenith in September 1953 when Israeli construction on a canal designed to divert water from the

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<sup>240</sup> "Eric Johnston Dies at Age 66," *Chicago Tribune*, August 23, 1963.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

Jordan River reached a critical stage.<sup>243</sup> The Jordan River was a strategically important body of water for Israel, Syria, and Jordan. Not only did it provide a vital resource for both agriculture and industry, but it demarcated the border between all three nations. Israel's canal enterprise, referred to as the Banat Yaacov Project, quickly garnered the ire of both Syria and Jordan. For Israel, though, the Banat Yaacov effort was far more than a simple irrigation project.

Water control efforts like this were part of the Israeli government's larger undertaking to attract Jewish immigrants from around the world to both drive their economy and man their army. As such, transforming arid deserts or uninhabitable swamps into arable farmland became a central tenant of a national security strategy bent on growing the population in the face of much larger and overtly hostile neighbors.<sup>244</sup> Credit the Cold War climate of the times but, the West initially viewed such projects with suspicion; fearful that the collective Kibbutz farms fed by projects like Banat Yaacov promoted Communism. To dispel such concerns, Moshe Sharett, at the time serving as Foreign Minister, explained that the Kibbutz farms served to teach immigrant Jews to "work with their hands" and that this was the business of nation building, from the bottom to the top.<sup>245</sup> He went on to describe how "Israel was a democracy in the true sense of the word," and that, by their nature, "Jews were individualists and the theory of Communism was abhorrent to them."<sup>246</sup> The Banat Yaacov Project was an important component of this mission

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<sup>243</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 172.

<sup>244</sup> Sandra M. Sufian, *Healing the Land and the Nation: Malaria and the Zionist Project in Palestine* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 3-4, 30, 79.

<sup>245</sup> Memorandum of Conversation with the Foreign Minister of Israel and Others, March 22, 1949, Acheson Papers, Secretary of State File, Memoranda of Conversations File, 1949-1953, Box 65, March, 1949, Truman Library.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

and, by September 1953, the Israelis were ready to dam the Jordan River and create a reservoir that could feed new canals running west into the Israeli desert.<sup>247</sup>

Jordan and Syria, on the other hand, saw the Banat Yaacov Project as both violating provisions of the 1949 General Armistice Agreement and depriving them of a much needed resource. They viewed the dam and Israel's work within the demilitarized zone as a direct threat to their national security and reasoned that if Israel was capable of diverting water from the Jordan River, it could effectively starve them of the precious resource should hostilities between them escalate. Control of the desert's most precious resource would give Israel a sizeable advantage over its neighbors.

The United States also took issue with the canal project, but not because they feared Israel would use the dam to deprive the Arabs of water, in fact, the State Department largely agreed that Israel had every legal right to dam the Jordan River.<sup>248</sup> Instead, their opposition to the canal rose out of the fact that, by enraging their neighbors, Israel jeopardized the multilateral defense pact in the works behind the scenes (1954 Baghdad Pact).<sup>249</sup> This was the specter of Israel haunting U.S. efforts in the region. Dulles and his agents feared that if they were unable to stop Israel from further angering its neighbors, Western efforts at building a Northern Tier to halt Soviet expansion would fall on deaf ears. In this regard, it was time for the United States to demonstrate that it was committed to becoming an honest and objective broker in the region.

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<sup>247</sup> The *Chargé* in Israel (Russell) to the Department of State, September 13, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1311-1312.

<sup>248</sup> The *Chargé* in Israel (Russell) to the Department of State, September 10, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1306-1308.

<sup>249</sup> The Ambassador in Syria (Moose) to the Department of State, September 9, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1303-1304.

Dulles' first step was to warn the Israelis that if they did not stop construction on the dam the U.S. would suspend all economic aid.<sup>250</sup> This message was simultaneously sent to Syria as a quick show of support for their position. Dulles followed through on his threat and suspended economic aid a month later when Israel continued work on the canal in the face of United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) opposition.<sup>251</sup> However, suspending economic aid was only meant as a temporary measure to halt Israeli construction until a more permanent solution could be devised. Dulles hoped to work the issue through the United Nations and he drafted a resolution with France and the United Kingdom that called on both parties to respect the decisions made by the UNTSO Chairman, Major General Vagn Bennike.<sup>252</sup> But Russia, playing to both Syria and Israel's desire to operate unencumbered by UNTSO, vetoed the measure and Dulles was left without a U.N. solution to the Jordan Valley problem.<sup>253</sup> This move by Russia not only stymied U.S. plans for resolving the dispute, but added fuel to the State Department's conviction that Russia sought to wield influence through destabilization. Although Israel agreed to temporarily halt construction on the canal at Banat Yaacov, it would only be a matter of time before they would begin construction again and, finding no easy solution in the U.N., Dulles now placed his hopes for a peaceful resolution entirely on Eric Johnston's shoulders.

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<sup>250</sup> The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Israel, September 8, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1303.

<sup>251</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 172.

<sup>252</sup> United Nations Security Council, "The Palestine Question, S/3151/Rev.2," January 20, 1954, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, accessed November 7, 2016, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/3151/Rev.2](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/3151/Rev.2).

<sup>253</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Security Council Official Records*, January 22, 1954, accessed November 7, 2016, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.656](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.656).



Given a wide berth, Johnston's instructions charged him with striking a water sharing deal based on the findings of a Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) study of the Jordan River Valley conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees.<sup>254</sup> At its core the study sought to distribute water on a needs basis to all parties involved but, for the purpose of this essay it must be noted that the TVA based plan sought substantial restrictions on Israel's territorial and resource related aspirations. It allotted a greater volume of water to be diverted to Jordan than Israel, demanded that Israel renounce its claim to unrestricted water rights, and even suggested that Israel cede territory running adjacent to the Jordan and Yarmuk Rivers in order to make the deal a reality.<sup>255</sup> These concessions were largely designed to meet the needs of the 450,000 Palestinians displaced by the 1948-1949 war by ensuring that Jordan, where many of them now sought refuge, had enough water to support this desperate population.

By presenting these conditions, the United States sought to garner favor from the wider Arab world by demonstrating objectivity and distancing itself from Israel. As a concession to Israel, Johnston's instructions encouraged him to abolish the demilitarized zones currently under the supervision of UNTSO.<sup>256</sup> This, on the other hand, was a sensitive condition for not only Jordan and Syria, but for the Arab world as a whole. First, eliminating the demilitarized zones along Israel's borders would be a significant step towards making, what the Arabs viewed as a temporary and illegitimate state, into a permanent one. This would allow Israel unfettered access to all its territory and, to prevent further hostilities, permanent borders would have to be agreed

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<sup>254</sup> The Secretary of State to the Chairman of the Advisory Board for International Development (Johnston), October 13, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1348-1353.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

upon. Second, Israel would be able to position its military wherever it desired within its territory; an unsavory thought for neighbors who saw it as a military behemoth with expansionist aspirations. Armed with these instructions Johnston stepped into the fray of Middle East diplomacy during the Cold War.

Just as Israel viewed its Banat Yaacov effort as much more than a simple irrigation project, Johnston saw the objective of his Middle East mission as far greater than negotiating a dispute over water. After his first trip to the region in late October and early November 1953, Johnston realized that the chances for a political solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute were marginal at best and, instead, “practical solutions” offered the best chance of success.<sup>257</sup> To Johnston, the Jordan Valley Project (JVP) he was charged with implementing held the key to peace as it would both decrease tension between neighbors and foster greater Arab-Israeli cooperation. In addition to the provisions listed above, the plan called for sweeping infrastructure investment in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria so that they too could better use the diverted water.

The benefits from this were two-fold. First, they would ameliorate conditions for the Palestinian refugees by facilitating more permanent and agreeable accommodations for them in Jordan.<sup>258</sup> To the State Department, providing these refugees with a reliable source of water for proper sanitation and agriculture could go a long way in defusing a contentious issue at the heart of the Arab-Israeli dispute since the 1948-1949 war.<sup>259</sup> Second, JVP estimates concluded that harnessing water from the Jordan River could bring over 200,000 acres of land into productive

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<sup>257</sup> Report by the President’s Special Representative (Johnston) to the President, November 17, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1418-1423.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (Jernegan), November 20, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1434-1435.

agricultural use while also providing a cheap source of energy for both individuals and industry.<sup>260</sup> As economic disparity between Israel and the Arab states was a source of Arab resentment, this would also support the U.S. strategic policy objective of improving Arab standards of living in step with the rapid improvements occurring in Israel.<sup>261</sup> Despite the JVP's apparent benefits, reaching agreement on it would require a spirit of cooperation henceforth unparalleled in previous negotiations.

Cooperation and a vested mutual interest lie at the heart of Johnston's mission. If successful, Johnston believed that giving both Israel and its Arab neighbors a vested stake in the Jordan River would force the parties to cooperate on a practical issue void of any political or cultural strife.<sup>262</sup> Essentially, if each of their fortunes relied on the efficient and equitable management of the Jordan River, they would be forced to foster relationships and cooperate to sustain their economies, agriculture, and the health of their populations. While this reasoned approach appeared sound on the surface, it failed to account for the cultural animosity at the root of the Arab-Israeli dispute, and bringing all parties to agreement would require much more than an impartial water sharing plan.

With Israeli work at Banat Yaacov temporarily halted, Johnston's first step in reaching accord lie in drawing the Arab states to the negotiating table. To accomplish this, he sought to tie U.S. economic assistance to "willingness to accept and abide by the principles embodied in the

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<sup>260</sup> Report by the President's Special Representative (Johnston) to the President, November 17, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1418-1423.

<sup>261</sup> Eli Ginzberg, Memorandum for Record, January 30, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (3); Dwight Eisenhower to John Foster Dulles, May 15, 1956, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President, 1953-1961, Ann Whitman File, Box 7, Dulles, Foster May '56, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>262</sup> Report by the President's Special Representative (Johnston) to the President, November 17, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1418-1423.

plan.”<sup>263</sup> Although this provision may seem like standard fare for peace negotiations, it set in motion a precedent that placed the United States at the center of Arab-Israeli relations and reinforced the notion that American benevolence was conditioned on the acceptance of Israel. From the Arab perspective, making the receipt of U.S. aid dependent on a nation’s willingness to negotiate with Israel did little to promote Eisenhower’s goal of becoming an objective broker of Middle East affairs. To them, it pointed to the power of Zionist influence and revealed the ultimate motive behind U.S. involvement in the region: strengthening and making permanent Israel. But, Johnston, Eisenhower, and Dulles’ reliance on economic aid as the lynchpin of Arab-Israeli relations also betrayed the direction and substance of broader U.S. policy in the region. To win favor and offset damage done by its association with Israel, the administration began to rely increasingly on forms of “checkbook diplomacy” to achieve its foreign policy objectives. Johnston’s mission was but the first in a chain of initiatives that promised aid in return for peacefully tolerating Israel. Surprisingly, it received a somewhat warm reception from Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria when introduced in 1953.

Often wracked by chronic instability and internal power struggles, the leaders of Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria were easily enticed by any measure that could improve their power and popularity.<sup>264</sup> Lucrative economic and military aid packages offered an easy way for these leaders to strengthen their hold on power by improving conditions for their citizenry and they often voiced sincere interest in how much and how often they would be receiving aid.<sup>265</sup>

Although it took over a year, by February 1955 Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon agreed to a slightly

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Eli Ginzberg, Memorandum for Record, January 30, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (3), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>265</sup> The Ambassador in Syria (Moose) to the Department of State, November 17, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1415.

modified version of the JVP presented by Johnston.<sup>266</sup> However, this final version of the plan placed financial incentives obligated by the United States at \$200,000,000 in excess of standard aid packages.<sup>267</sup> While Eisenhower found the new figures rather exorbitant, what surprised Johnston and the State Department was who played spoiler and ultimately rejected the deal.<sup>268</sup> Unwilling to cede the requisite amount of water to Jordan or Syria, and concerned about appearing weak amid an election that pitted him against the much more hawkish Ben Gurion, Israeli Prime Minister Moshe Sharret rejected the JVP deal and effectively ended Johnston's mission.<sup>269</sup>

In the end, Johnston was unable to produce a water sharing agreement between Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria before regional events prompted Dulles and Eisenhower to explore new methods of extracting concessions from the Middle East. Although it ultimately failed, the Jordan Valley Project serves as a strong example of Eisenhower and Dulles' willingness to devote significant financial aid and diplomatic energy to righting the perceived wrong of America's association with Israel. Johnston spent over 18 months on the project and offered the Arab parties more than \$155,000,000 above their allotted aid packages to agree to a deal that would improve their infrastructure, standard of living, and economies, all to no avail. He continued to work on the project through the summer of 1955, eventually extracting concessions from Israel in accordance with the agreement made between the Arab states in February.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Telegram from Ambassador Eric Johnston to the Department of State, February 20, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:66-68.

<sup>267</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Department of State, March 16, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:109-112.

<sup>268</sup> Memorandum of Conversation Between the President and the Secretary of State, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:53-54.

<sup>269</sup> Telegram from Ambassador Eric Johnston to the Department of State, February 24, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:68-69.

<sup>270</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 174.

Unfortunately, by August, border skirmishes between Israel and its neighbors prompted the Arab states to withdraw their support for the agreement and Dulles conceded that Johnston and the JVP had run its course.<sup>271</sup>

Ironically, Johnston may have lost domestic support for his mission long before he ran into opposition in the Middle East. In April 1954, only six months after Johnston filed his first status report, Dulles expressed interest in identifying a “new approach” towards peace between the Arabs and Israel.<sup>272</sup> Shortly thereafter, NSC 5428 noted that current efforts towards improving the U.S. position in the region were falling short and, “Unless these trends are reversed, the Near East may well be lost to the West within the next few years.”<sup>273</sup> In January 1955, while Johnston was still at work on the JVP, the State Department was discussing plans for a covert initiative to win Arab support from a different, yet equally important player in the region.<sup>274</sup>

From afar, Gamal Abdel Nasser watched the U.S. sanctioned negotiations between Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria and learned a critical lesson from the affair. Nasser quickly learned that accepting U.S. aid meant accepting Israel and, if he was going to emerge as the leader of a Pan-Arab union, this was a condition he could not afford to accept. Therefore, in September 1955, in a move that sent shockwaves throughout the West, Nasser sought aid from a source that certainly did not demand concessions toward Israel. This move intensified the pace and scope of

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<sup>271</sup> Letter from the Secretary of State to the President, August 19, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:368-369.

<sup>272</sup> Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (Byroade), April 10, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1508-1509.

<sup>273</sup> Statement of Policy by the National Security Council, NSC 5428, July 23, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:525-536.

<sup>274</sup> Despatch from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, January 7, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:5-7.

Dulles' "new approach" and marked the second phase of the administration's efforts to improve its influence in the region. While Johnston's JVP was a reaction to the perception that U.S. influence in the Middle East was waning, the "new approach" advocated by Dulles took on increased urgency once evidence emerged that the U.S. was falling out of favor with the region.

*MiGs, Missiles, and Soviet Meddling: Operation Alpha*

By the spring of 1954, Secretary of State Dulles realized that the prospect of peace between Israel and its neighbors via direct intervention by the United States was becoming increasingly bleak. An uptick in border violence between Jordan and Israel, culminating with an Israeli raid on the village of Nahhalin, resulted in Israel walking out on its Mixed Armistice Commission commitments.<sup>275</sup> Unable to resolve the issue through the MAC, Dulles turned to the United Nations but Soviet efforts to garner favor from the Arabs meant any resolution that was not an outright censure of Israel would be vetoed by the Russians. In a conversation with the British Foreign Secretary and soon to be Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, Dulles doubted that the "balanced policy" being pursued by his administration would "increase our influence with Arab states."<sup>276</sup> Later, he expressed similar concerns to President Eisenhower and posited that Israel's increasingly aggressive behavior was evidence that they were attempting to provoke open war with their neighbors to secure more favorable terms than those offered by either the United Nations or the Johnston mission.<sup>277</sup> Eisenhower reassured Dulles that their impartial approach offered the best chance for peace in the near future and warned him not to let the upcoming mid-term elections sway a tough position on Israel or interfere with the sensitive Baghdad Pact

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<sup>275</sup> Evidence of Israel's Aggressive Policy, April 8, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1503-1505.

<sup>276</sup> The Secretary of State to the Department of State, April 13, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1513-1514.

<sup>277</sup> Memorandum of Conference with President Eisenhower, April 28, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 9:1528-1529.

negotiations. Frustrated by the multilateral negotiations occurring over the JVP, Dulles began searching for an alternative and, along with his younger brother Allen Dulles, the Director of the CIA, hatched a covert plan to build influence and stymie Soviet efforts in the one place they appeared to be making gains: Egypt.

With Johnston's multilateral approach floundering, Dulles began secret talks with the British Foreign Office about a more direct and bilateral approach towards peace between Egypt and Israel that, because of its clandestine origins, became known as Operation Alpha.<sup>278</sup> Although not evident at first, the reason for this engagement with Egypt becomes apparent when placed in the wider context. First, Egypt was not part of the Baghdad Pact negotiations and, because of this, it was militarily non-aligned and seen as vulnerable to Soviet influence. Infuriated by the pact, the State Department worried that Nasser may actively seek Soviet military aid and guarantees as a counterbalance to Western aid promised to pact member and regional rival Iraq. In addition to this, Nasser's celebrated appearance at the Bandung Conference in April 1955 only reinforced the belief that, if something was not done soon, Egypt may continue to distance itself from the West. The conference brought together a veritable "who's who" of the unaligned Third World and emerging nations forged new alliances which sought an alternative to the dichotomy of seeking assistance from either the West or the Soviet Union.<sup>279</sup> Second, Israel appeared ready to engage in dialogue with Egypt and believed that peace with Egypt was a prerequisite to peace with the wider Arab world.<sup>280</sup> Finally, inducements for peace abound between the two nations; Israel sought concessions like navigation rights

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<sup>278</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation between Dulles et al., January 27, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:28-32.

<sup>279</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 99-102.

<sup>280</sup> Despatch From the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, January 7, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:5-7.



through the Suez and an ease to the trade embargo emplaced by its neighbors, and Nasser longed for economic and military aid to improve his aspirations of becoming the premier representative of the Arab world. Considering this, Dulles saw an opportunity for less complicated bilateral negotiations that could enhance U.S. influence in the region and bring a potential Soviet ally into the Western fold. If they could get Nasser on board, the State Department believed that it would then be much easier to negotiate settlements with Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

Because the State Department believed that Sharett was prepared to discuss peace with Egypt, initial overtures were directed at Nasser in an effort to stroke his ego and emphasize the potential for regional influence should he take the lead in making peace.<sup>281</sup> Additionally, the State Department hoped to play on Nasser's economic and military ambitions by offering lucrative aid packages should he agree to a deal.<sup>282</sup> In this regard, it must be noted that Operation Alpha centered on building Nasser's power, influence, and popularity in the region; a sharp contrast to the policy that would follow. To highlight the importance of the negotiations and add an air of prestige, it was decided that the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, would breach the prospect of peace with Israel during a visit to Cairo in February of 1955.<sup>283</sup> If Nasser was receptive, the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, Henry Byroade, would continue negotiations. However, if Nasser was ever going to make concessions to Israel, all parties agreed that Operation Alpha had to remain secret until initial overtures could be made. This ensured that Nasser would not garner criticism from his rivals for appearing like a colonial puppet and

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<sup>281</sup> Points of Agreement in London Discussions of Arab-Israel Settlement, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:98-107.

<sup>282</sup> Memorandum from the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (Jernegan) to the Under Secretary of State (Hoover), January 14, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:7-9.

<sup>283</sup> Despatch from the Embassy in the United Kingdom to the Department of State, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:59-62.

prevented the negotiations from impacting the West's principal objective in the region: the Baghdad Pact.<sup>284</sup> For these reasons, Operation Alpha was heavily orchestrated by Dulles' brother, Allen, and his CIA operatives.

The negotiating framework for Operation Alpha consisted of two categories of inducements. The first category contained concessions that Israel and Egypt would have to make between each other, while the second category was composed of elements that the U.S. and the U.K. were prepared to offer in exchange for an agreement. The first category, the issues that required resolution between Egypt and Israel, revolved around territory, borders, refugees, and the economic embargo on Israel.<sup>285</sup> To the benefit of Israel, the State Department suggested permanent borders between Israel and Egypt by abolishing the demilitarized zones that ran between them. For Egypt, they proposed that "triangles of land" be ceded from Israel to Egypt and Jordan, respectively, to create a contiguous border between them and facilitate overland travel and communications.<sup>286</sup> The framework suggested that Egypt should work through the Arab League to drop the trade embargo on Israel and allow the passage of Israeli vessels through the Suez Canal.<sup>287</sup> The State Department also proposed that refugees, now residing in border villages in Jordan, be granted access to their traditional farmlands in Israel. It was argued that 75,000 of these refugees be allowed repatriation to Israel and, those that did not return, be compensated for the loss of their property.<sup>288</sup> This last point was a serious issue for the Israelis who argued that they could not afford the \$280,000,000 in proposed compensation. Finally, the

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<sup>284</sup> Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Egypt, March 31, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:127-128.

<sup>285</sup> Memorandum from Francis H. Russel to the Secretary of State, Summary Statement of Alpha Proposals, May 18, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:200-204.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

U.S. and the U.K., in collusion with the UNTSO, offered to guarantee the integrity of the border between the two nations if an agreement was reached.<sup>289</sup>

These difficult concessions were sweetened by the proposition of inducements from the U.S. and the U.K. Should an agreement be made, it was estimated that, in addition to the \$486,000,000 already obligated to the region, the United States would provide \$545,000,000 in aid to Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.<sup>290</sup> This was a significant increase over the \$200,000,000 offered under the Johnston plan and it came in various forms. The U.S. would provide a \$150,000,000 loan to Israel to compensate Palestinian refugees; \$45,000,000 was allotted for Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon should they subsequently join the deal; and, in a surprising change of position, \$250,000,000 was allocated for military aid to Egypt and Israel, a provision eagerly sought by both parties.<sup>291</sup> However, in the eyes of the State Department, the key to enticing Nasser was an offer to provide \$100,000,000 in financing and technical expertise to facilitate the construction of his coveted Aswan Dam.<sup>292</sup> With Eden's initial effort to feel out Nasser yielding some promise, Dulles alluded to Operation Alpha in a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations on August 26, 1955, and passed the mission to Ambassador Byroade who was charged with working out the substance of a potential agreement.<sup>293</sup>

Initial negotiations with Nasser and his Foreign Minister, Dr. Mahmoud Fawzi, appeared encouraging but, the Egyptians were unwilling to accept the "triangle" plan for a corridor connecting Egypt to Jordan and, instead, Fawzi pushed for a larger swath of land to join the two

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Telegram from the Secretary of State to the Department of State, February 24, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:70; "Partial Transcript of Dulles' Talk," *New York Times*, August 31, 1955.

nations.<sup>294</sup> One of Nasser's closest confidants, Fawzi understood the reasoning behind Nasser's obdurate position on the Negev corridor. A narrow, internationally supervised corridor connecting Egypt to the rest of the Arab world would make it extremely difficult for Nasser to realize his goal of a Pan-Arab Union. Israel too was unyielding on the territorial cessions it was asked to make and refused outright to "give up the Negev in whole or in part."<sup>295</sup> The parties were at an impasse over territorial arrangements and even the optimistic Fawzi hinted that a deal may be impossible.<sup>296</sup> Henry Byroade also began to lose faith in the bilateral approach confessing that, "Arab-Israeli settlement can most probably never be achieved by treating [the] matter in isolation from other matters in [the] Middle East."<sup>297</sup> Little did Byroade know that, as negotiations stalled, Nasser was working behind the scenes to make a separate deal that would shock the West and set in motion a chain of events that nearly precipitated world war.

On September 20, 1955, the State Department learned that Nasser struck a significant arms deal with the Soviet Union that included the heavy weapons, like MiG fighters and main battle tanks, he so long desired.<sup>298</sup> In one move, Nasser made real three of the United States' greatest concerns: an enhanced Soviet role in the region, the potential for an arms race between Israel and Egypt, and, should that escalate, a surrogate war between the United States and Russia waged on the sands of the Negev. This marked the move from a perceived problem with prestige,

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<sup>294</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, August 17, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:358-360.

<sup>295</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Department of State, September 6, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:451-453.

<sup>296</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, September 14, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:468-469.

<sup>297</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, September 11, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:461-463.

<sup>298</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, September 21, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:492-493.

to a very real issue in the minds of the Eisenhower administration. Dulles and State Department officials knew for years that Nasser desired heavy arms and he reminded them of that when he indicated that part of his motive for turning to the Soviets lie in several failed promises by the United States to deliver arms to Egypt.<sup>299</sup> Only a month prior Eisenhower and Dulles discussed providing arms to Egypt and agreed that this course of action should be pursued; however, they ultimately failed to follow through, and this, from Nasser's perspective, was par for the course in dealing with the West.<sup>300</sup> It should also be noted that Nasser's suspicions of the Baghdad Pact played a significant role in his decision to seek arms from the Soviet Union as a security guarantee against an ever growing Arab alliance.<sup>301</sup> Further explaining his decision, Nasser pointed to a February 28, 1955 Israeli raid on Gaza as the tipping point for his decision to make arms acquisitions his administration's top priority.<sup>302</sup> Once again, Arab-Israeli tension seemed to be undermining U.S. efforts. Taken back by these developments, Dulles and the State Department struggled with developing a coherent way forward for dealing with an Egypt that appeared increasingly drawn towards Moscow.

The ramifications of the Egypt-Soviet arms deal were many and the Eisenhower administration grappled with whether to employ "the carrot or the stick" in their complicated dealings with Egypt. In a move to isolate Egypt, there was talk of the United States joining the

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<sup>299</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, October 1, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:537-540.

<sup>300</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation Between the President and the Secretary of State, August 5, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:338-339; Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, September 20, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:483-484.

<sup>301</sup> Message from Robert B. Anderson to the Department of State, January 19, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:28-36.

<sup>302</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, October 1, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:537-540.

Baghdad Pact and “bringing with us as many Arab states as possible.”<sup>303</sup> There were also discussions about entering a security pact with Israel and Eisenhower even considered providing state-of-the-art Nike surface-to-air missiles and advanced interceptor aircraft to Israel.<sup>304</sup> On the other hand, the State Department was not quite ready to abandon its recently hatched Operation Alpha and decided to keep certain inducements on the table should Nasser become more agreeable to reconciliation terms. This meant that, for the time being, Alpha and the offer to finance construction of the Aswan Dam remained on the table.<sup>305</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the Egyptian-Soviet arms deal the U.S. and the U.K. were uncertain how to proceed. Fearful that a sudden change of policy could upset the Baghdad Pact, bolster Soviet overtures to other Arab states, or further enhance Nasser’s prestige, both governments decided to stay the course and pursue an Egypt-Israel settlement under the auspices of Operation Alpha.<sup>306</sup> However, with a presidential election looming, Eisenhower and Dulles knew that continued negotiations with a Soviet oriented Egypt would not sit well in the press and, with increasing cries for assistance from Israel, certain steps were needed to mitigate this election year liability.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Egypt, September 20, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:491-492.

<sup>304</sup> Memorandum from Undersecretary (Hoover) of State to Secretary of State, March 1, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (3), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>305</sup> Telegram from the Department of State to the Secretary of State, October 29, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:677-679.

<sup>306</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Department of State, October 6, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:558-562.

<sup>307</sup> Memorandum of Conversation Between Secretary Dulles and Mr. Molotov, October 30, 1955, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-59, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memos of Conversation - General - L Through M (4), Eisenhower Library.

Unlike President Truman, who reversed a policy position on the eve of the election (Bernadotte Plan), Eisenhower recognized a more nuanced means existed to alleviate domestic concern over U.S. dealings in the Middle East without compromising administration principles. As the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal became a reality, and the State Department decided that it would continue with Operation Alpha, Dulles and Vice President Nixon discussed how best to continue negotiations with Egypt while mitigating fall-out that could adversely impact the election. The two agreed that a bipartisan approach could assuage congressional objections that Eisenhower may encounter during his electoral rematch with Adlai Stevenson, and Dulles began looking for a respected emissary to continue the administration's efforts.<sup>308</sup> He ultimately settled on the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Robert Anderson, to lead Operation Alpha into 1956.

Anderson was selected for both his bipartisan appeal and his stature. A lifelong Democrat until the 1956 election, attacking his efforts in the Middle East would prove difficult for Stevenson and his allies in congress.<sup>309</sup> Additionally, Eisenhower thought highly of Anderson and even had faith in his ability to one day serve as President.<sup>310</sup> It was also believed that his stature as the Deputy Secretary of Defense and former Secretary of the Navy would appeal to Nasser's ego and, perhaps, encourage him to reconsider his weapons deal with the Soviets.<sup>311</sup> While Anderson's appointment may have made it more difficult for congressional Democrats to attack Eisenhower during the 1956 election, the Zionist lobby and the Jewish vote were still relevant concerns in the wake of the Egypt-Soviet arms deal.

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<sup>308</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation with the Secretary of State, October 18, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:612-613.

<sup>309</sup> Eric Pace, "Robert B. Anderson, Ex-Treasury Chief, Dies at 79," *New York Times*, August 16, 1989.

<sup>310</sup> Diary Entry by the President, January 11, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:23.

<sup>311</sup> Memorandum from the Secretary of State's Special Assistant (Russell) to the Secretary of State, December 28, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:888-889.

As the Egyptian-Soviet arms deal threatened to set off a regional arms race, Eisenhower came under increasing pressure to sell arms to Israel but the administration stood firm in its position and refused to provide additional weapons.<sup>312</sup> This evoked a fervent response from lobbyists, like Rabbi Hillel Silver, as well as fellow Republicans on the ballot in 1956. In a public rebuke of the administration's policy in the Middle East, Jacob Javits, a Republican running for a U.S. senate seat in New York, denounced "the Eisenhower administration's refusal of arms to Israel."<sup>313</sup> Even Prime Minister Ben-Gurion made a personal appeal to Eisenhower that only, "planes and tanks - of equal quality to those in the hands of Egypt...can deter an Egyptian attack, save Israel from untold sacrifice and damage and the Middle East from a war pregnant with danger to mankind."<sup>314</sup> However, Eisenhower was steadfast in the face of both domestic criticism and emotionally charged requests and refused to alter his position for several reasons.<sup>315</sup>

First, Eisenhower and Dulles feared the potential outcome of an arms race between a Soviet supplied Egypt and a U.S. backed Israel.<sup>316</sup> Not only could this provoke a world war but, short of this, it could drive Egypt further into Soviet orbit as each new delivery of arms would come with new conditions attached by Moscow. Second, providing arms to Israel would likely

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<sup>312</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, United States Policy Towards Israel, April 23, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (2), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>313</sup> "Javits Sees Challenge, Scores Eisenhower on Policy Barring Arms to Israel," *New York Times*, May 30, 1956.

<sup>314</sup> Letter from Prime Minister Ben-Gurion to President Eisenhower, March 16, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:372-374.

<sup>315</sup> Letter from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, April 30, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:589.

<sup>316</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, United States Policy Towards Israel, April 23, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (2), Eisenhower Library.



derail Robert Anderson's sensitive negotiations with Nasser and do little to encourage reconciliation efforts between Israel and Egypt.<sup>317</sup> Finally, at a May 1956 NATO ministerial summit, Dulles met with French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau and voiced no opposition to France or any other Western nation providing arms to Israel and, shortly thereafter, the Israelis received their second batch of Mystere fighter aircraft from France.<sup>318</sup> Eisenhower's refusal to play politics with the Israeli arms requests, and his willingness to continue negotiations with Nasser during an election year, serve as additional examples of his commitment to a pragmatic and principled foreign policy that placed Cold War objectives above partisan politics. Satisfied they had eased Israeli concerns and done all they could to quell election year opposition, the Eisenhower administration made one final attempt to lure Nasser to the negotiating table.

Robert Anderson was officially selected as the intermediary to advance elements of the Alpha negotiations on January 9, 1956.<sup>319</sup> In the wake of the Egypt-Soviet arms deal, Anderson's mission took on increased importance and he personally met with Eisenhower and Dulles to discuss the points of negotiation days before setting off for Cairo. Their conversation revealed a sense of desperation not evident in earlier dialogue on the subject. For example, the first negotiating point revolved around the possibility of limiting the Baghdad Pact to its current members (Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, and the U.K.) and deemphasizing U.S. support for the alliance.<sup>320</sup> This option was not yet discussed with the U.K., the pact's patriarch, and risked

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<sup>317</sup> Memorandum of Conversation with the President, March 2, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (3), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>318</sup> Telegram from the Delegation at the North Atlantic Council Ministerial Meeting to the Department of State, May 3, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:595-598; Telegram to President Eisenhower from Secretary of State, May 6, 1956, and Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President, 1953-61 (Ann Whitman File), Dulles-Herter Series, Box 7, Dulles, John Foster, April 1956, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>319</sup> Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:16.

<sup>320</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, January 11, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:20-22.

weakening the Northern Tier security concept. Second was the threat of economic warfare against Egypt by flooding the international market with cotton - an Egyptian economic staple. This was surprising not only for its boldness, but, for its desperation. Nasser had already found eager trading partners for Egyptian cotton in the Soviet Union and China, both of which were closed to the United States. The third element, financing the Aswan Dam, was a vestige of Operation Alpha but it came to play a pivotal role as negotiations evolved.<sup>321</sup> Eisenhower long believed that financing the Aswan Dam held real promise for coaxing Nasser to a settlement with Israel; however, evidence suggests that Dulles began to doubt the wisdom of this offer shortly after the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal the previous fall.<sup>322</sup>

The final inducement for Egypt was an offer to construct a canal parallel to the Suez that, financed by U.S. oil companies, would increase canal traffic and revenue for Egypt. As their conversation shifted to refugee compensation and the costs associated with the plan, desperation again became evident. On this subject Anderson was essentially given a blank check as, “a settlement would be so valuable to the United States and would attract such large political support that Congress would almost assuredly vote the necessary funds.”<sup>323</sup> Unlike the meticulous fiscal analysis that went into the JVP and the original Operation Alpha, the urgency surrounding Anderson’s mission was so great that he was given financial free reign to foster a bargain. This reveals an increasing trend by the Eisenhower administration to rely on “checkbook diplomacy” to foment good relations with the Arab world. Further representative of an Eisenhower administration trend was the guidance given to Anderson regarding Israel. In keeping with the policy of pivoting towards the Arabs, no new inducements were offered to

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<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>322</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, October 28, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:670-672.

<sup>323</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, January 11, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:20-22.

Israel and it was instead suggested that Anderson emphasize the need for Israel to compromise now that the Soviet Union had taken an active role in providing arms to the Arabs.<sup>324</sup> With Eisenhower's personal blessing, Anderson set off for the Middle East four days later.

Anderson met with Nasser on January 18, 1956 and their initial meeting held out promise that a peace agreement with Israel was possible. Nasser expressed interest in discussing terms with Israel but was concerned with what a deal between Egypt and Israel would do to his standing in the wider Arab world.<sup>325</sup> Ever preoccupied with the notion of a Pan-Arab Union under his leadership, Nasser worried that a deal with Israel would provide ample fodder for his rivals in Iraq or Saudi Arabia to undermine his prestige. He also divulged that, to ensure domestic opinion would acquiesce to an Egyptian-Israeli settlement, a six-month period of calm would be required before going public with the proceedings.<sup>326</sup> This rightfully alarmed Dulles and Anderson as there had not been a six-month respite from border skirmishes since Israeli statehood in 1948.

Undaunted, Anderson went ahead, but Nasser soon raised the same staunch demands about territorial concessions that Ambassador Byroade encountered during his Operation Alpha negotiations the previous fall.<sup>327</sup> He also stood firm on a demand that all the Palestinian refugees have the right to repatriation, a position wholly unacceptable to Israel. Over the next few days Nasser grew increasingly "fatalistic" during negotiations with Anderson and pledged to go

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<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>325</sup> Message from Robert B. Anderson to the Department of State, January 19, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:28-36.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>327</sup> Message from Robert B. Anderson to the Department of State, January 21, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:43-47.

without economic and infrastructure improvements to continue building Egypt's military.<sup>328</sup> He referenced a pact with Israel by any Arab leader as political suicide and, despite initial hopes, it appeared an agreement was unlikely. As Nasser remained obstinate and outright refused direct talks with Ben-Gurion, Anderson refocused his efforts on trying to extract a written non-aggression pact from both parties.<sup>329</sup> As priorities shifted, provisions in the original offer began to fall by the wayside and one, the offer to finance the Aswan Dam, was neglected completely.

As early as March 1956 Dulles confided to the Israeli ambassador, Abba Eban, that Anderson's mission was a failure and he urged the Israelis not to upset the delicate truce that had taken hold along the border.<sup>330</sup> As a result of the failed Anderson mission, the State Department decided to stall on further discussions of financing the Aswan Dam.<sup>331</sup> However, it is unclear whether Eisenhower was on board with this decision and weeks later he inquired to the Under Secretary of State, Hoover, about the status of the project.<sup>332</sup> This episode reveals one of the few splits between Eisenhower and Dulles. The President believed that the \$100,000,000 offer was critical in preventing the Soviets from drawing Egypt further into their orbit by financing the project. Dulles, on the other hand, saw the offer to finance the dam on the heels of the Egyptian-Soviet arms deal as a reward for bad behavior and he worried that it would be hard to explain this decision to other allies who had not defied U.S. requests.<sup>333</sup> Dulles and the State Department

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<sup>328</sup> Message from Robert B. Anderson to the Department of State, January 22, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:47-50.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> Notes for Talk with Eban, March 28, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-59, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (3), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>331</sup> Memorandum by the Director of Near Eastern Affairs (Wilkins), March 14, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:352-357.

<sup>332</sup> Memorandum from Eisenhower to Hoover, May 2, 1956, Eisenhower, Dwight D., Papers as President, 1953-1961 (Ann Whitman File), Dulles-Herter Series, Box 7, Dulles, Foster, May 1956, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>333</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, October 28, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:670-672.

won out and, with the help of the British, they decided to delay all discussions about the Aswan Dam hoping that this would show Nasser that he could not, “cooperate with the Soviet Union and at the same time enjoy most-favored-nation treatment from the United States.”<sup>334</sup>

Subsequent events appeared to justify this decision as information trickled in that painted Nasser as continuing to collude with the Soviets and completely opposed to any agreement with Israel.<sup>335</sup> In March, Prime Minister Eden personally wrote to Eisenhower to share intelligence that claimed Nasser was working with the Soviets to build a United Arab Union by deposing the rulers of Iraq, Jordan, Libya, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>336</sup> In May, to the disdain of the State Department, Egypt officially recognized communist China. Finally, in June, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Dmitri Shepilov, visited Cairo and made a generous offer to finance construction of the Aswan Dam in exchange for Egyptian cotton.<sup>337</sup> This was the last straw and, on July 19, 1956, Dulles met with the Egyptian Ambassador and officially withdrew the U.S. offer to finance the dam.<sup>338</sup> Dulles and the State Department opted for the “stick” as a means of showing Nasser that the United States would not be played off against the Soviet Union.

In his diary, Eisenhower pointed to the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal and Nasser’s unwillingness to compromise as the primary motives behind the United States’ decision to drop its support for the dam.<sup>339</sup> However, this decision had far reaching consequences and Nasser’s

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<sup>334</sup> Memorandum for the President, March 28, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (3), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>335</sup> Diary Entry by the President, March 13, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:342-343.

<sup>336</sup> Message from Prime Minister Eden to President Eisenhower, March 15, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:364-365.

<sup>337</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, June 24, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:747.

<sup>338</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, July 19, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:867-873.

<sup>339</sup> Eisenhower Diary, August 8, 1956, Eisenhower, Dwight D., Papers as President of the United States, 1953-1961 (Ann Whitman File), DDE Diary Series, Box 17, Eisenhower Library.

response triggered an escalation of tensions in the region heretofore unseen. In hindsight, the State Department may have wished they had heeded the Iraqi Ambassador's advice when he told Henry Byroade that, "I know there are many who say it is wrong to aid your enemy. If Nasser were alone I would agree. However, behind him is the Soviet Union which is our real enemy and if you fail [to] aid Nasser you are not halting your enemy, you are actually strengthening him."<sup>340</sup>

Operation Alpha and the subsequent Anderson mission represented the second phase of U.S. efforts to exert influence in the Middle East by fostering peace between Israel and Egypt. The 1955 Soviet-Egyptian arms deal heightened the urgency of this effort and betrayed a sense of desperation on the administration's part. The administration made generous offers to finance arms and infrastructure to the amount of \$545,000,000 over existing aid packages should Israel and its neighbors agree to live peaceably. Eisenhower and Dulles discussed weakening the pillar of Western security policy in the region, the Baghdad Pact/Northern Tier, and Anderson was given a blank check to offer incentives for a peace deal. However, these inducements were not enough to yield concessions from Nasser who saw any agreement with Israel as a form of political suicide. Instead, Nasser sought aid from the Soviet Union where it was not conditioned on negotiations with Israel. This drove Eisenhower and Dulles to drop their offer to finance the Aswan Dam and the two began considering a policy of "weakening Nasser" as opposed to their previous efforts at building him up as the leader of the Arab world.<sup>341</sup> Israel too proved unwilling to compromise on the territorial cessions placed before it and began enhancing its military stockpiles in response to the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal. This combination of events became a

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<sup>340</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, June 24, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:747.

<sup>341</sup> Eisenhower to Dulles, July 17, 1956, Eisenhower, Dwight D., Papers as President, 1953-1961 (Ann Whitman File), Dulles-Herter Series, Box 7, Dulles, John Foster, July 1956, Eisenhower Library.

powder keg resting just beneath the desert sands and, before Eisenhower and Dulles could defuse it, the keg burst when Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956.

*Money for Nothing: Suez and the Eisenhower Doctrine*

One week after the United States officially withdrew its offer to help finance the Aswan Dam, Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. His speech nationalizing the canal was broadcast live from Alexandria and served as the trigger for Egyptian officials to seize control of canal infrastructure and operations. The speech was also a diatribe against the West and Israel with Nasser claiming, “They strengthened Israel so they can annihilate us and convert us into a state of refugees.”<sup>342</sup> While this undoubtedly played to the anti-Israeli sentiment popular on the Arab street, it also betrayed Nasser’s concern that the West was beginning to conspire against him directly.<sup>343</sup> On top of dropping the offer to finance the dam, that same month the State Department made clear their intention to reassign Ambassador Byroade from Egypt to South Africa for his perceived ineffectiveness at bringing Nasser to heel.<sup>344</sup> Byroade had a reputation for being overly sympathetic to the Arabs and, as Egypt drifted closer to the Soviet Union, this transfer was part of the administration’s new strategy to weaken Nasser by assigning a tougher ambassador to the billet.<sup>345</sup>

Feeling suddenly neglected by the West, Nasser turned to his new ally, the Soviet Union, who formally agreed to help finance construction of the Aswan Dam on July 24, 1956.<sup>346</sup> With

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<sup>342</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 270.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>344</sup> Eric Pace, “Henry Byroade, 80, Ambassador to Egypt and 5 Other Countries,” *New York Times*, January 3, 1994.

<sup>345</sup> Henry Byroade, interview by Neil M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library Oral History Interviews, September 21, 1988, accessed November 21, 2016, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/orahist/byroade.htm>.

<sup>346</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, July 26, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:901-902.

his dream of damming the Nile revived, Nasser jumped at the opportunity to secure a second revenue stream to augment the aid promised by the Soviets. Egypt had been in dire financial straits for quite some time and the government was estimated to be hemorrhaging between \$2,000,000 to \$4,000,000 USD per month.<sup>347</sup> Nasser hoped that nationalizing the Suez Canal would halt this fiscal bleed while also providing the additional funds required to complete construction on the dam.<sup>348</sup> Having never delivered the arms they once promised, and renegeing on the offer to finance the dam, Nasser saw nothing left to lose from the West when he defied Egypt's former colonial masters by dismantling the Suez Canal Company.

As the Suez Crisis escalated between July 1956 and March 1957, the Eisenhower administration was forced to confront its worst fear in the region as Nasser seized control of Europe's oil lifeline and, in response, England, France, and Israel initiated a war that threatened to involve the Soviet Union.<sup>349</sup> In the context of the previous year's arms deal with the Soviets, and their recent agreement to finance the Aswan Dam, the State Department began to view Egypt as a blossoming Soviet satellite that now had the ability to control the flow of oil to Europe. This had the potential to place Europe at the mercy of Russia and, according to Dulles, "would be just about as effective as if they threatened them with atomic destruction."<sup>350</sup> Describing Nasser's actions to a bipartisan meeting of congressmen on the eve of the London Conference, Dulles "referred to a desire on the part of Nasser to unite the Arab world and if possible the Moslem

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<sup>347</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, August 15, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:353-354.

<sup>348</sup> Diary Entry by President Eisenhower, August 8, 1956, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President, 1953-1961 (Ann Whitman File), DDE Diary Series, Box 17, August 1956 Diary, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>349</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, March 30, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Box 10, Israeli Relations 1951-1957 (2), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*



world, and to use Mid-East oil and the Suez Canal as weapons against the West.”<sup>351</sup> Such dire consequences called for desperate measures and this marked the third phase of the administration’s policy in the region. Nasser’s decision set in motion a chain of events that tested the special relationship between the U.K. and the U.S. like never before and forever altered Eisenhower’s approach towards diplomacy in the Middle East. In the end this new approach was manifest in the Eisenhower Doctrine, where the receipt of U.S. aid was no longer conditioned on acquiescence towards Israel and money flowed freely to any state deemed critical in the fight against Communism.

In the immediate aftermath of Nasser’s decision to nationalize the canal, the Eisenhower administration attempted to do damage control while calming their furious European allies. The British and French stood to lose the most from nationalization as, not only did they hold the lion’s share of stock in the canal company, but, more importantly, their economies relied on the oil that flowed through the Suez. French Prime Minister Guy Mollet was enraged and he demanded unity between the United States, the U.K., and France in turning back Nasser lest, “all western positions in the Middle East and North Africa will be lost within the next 12 months.”<sup>352</sup> Nationalizing the canal only exasperated the tenuous relationship between Mollet and Nasser as the latter’s support for the National Liberation Front in Algeria and his Arab nationalist rhetoric infuriated Mollet as France had recently lost their protectorate in Indochina and was stuck waging a bloody counterinsurgency to hold on to Algeria. Anthony Eden was equally unnerved and wrote Eisenhower urging swift economic and political action to pressure Nasser to relinquish

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<sup>351</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, August 12, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:188-196.

<sup>352</sup> Telegram from Embassy in France to Department of State, July 31, 1956, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President, 1953-1961 (Ann Whitman File), Dulles-Herter Series, Box 7, Dulles, John Foster, July 1956, Eisenhower Library.

control of the canal.<sup>353</sup> He also mentioned that the U.K. was prepared to use force and that he had instructed his Chiefs of Staff to begin planning military contingencies to remove Nasser from the canal.

Eisenhower, on the other hand, urged restraint and recognized that western intervention to regain control of the canal would be interpreted by world opinion as undiluted colonialism.<sup>354</sup> He preferred a calculated response as a safeguard against the danger that could ensue should a haphazard reaction trigger the Soviet Union to intervene on behalf of Egypt. Dulles' first task, therefore, was to diffuse the British and French inclination for armed intervention. He worried that such an act would destroy "the influence of the West in the Middle East and most of Africa for a generation, if not a century," and this would be a windfall for the Russians who could further exploit Arab anger and expand their position in the region.<sup>355</sup> Because of this, Eisenhower and Dulles desperately sought a diplomatic solution that Egypt would agree to. They shelved their plan to weaken Nasser and decided to keep Byroade on as ambassador with the hope that his cordial relationship with the Egyptian President would be useful in the negotiations that lay ahead. Having temporarily halted the European march to war, the U.K., France, and the United States agreed to meet in London to discuss the way forward.

Throughout August 1956, the three parties discussed the implications of nationalization and struggled to develop an effective recourse that suited all interests. Talks were quickly expanded to include nineteen additional nations that relied on the canal for transit and shipping, however, Egypt was notably absent. On its surface, the London Conference sought "To decide

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<sup>353</sup> Message from Prime Minister Eden to President Eisenhower, July 27, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:9-11.

<sup>354</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 280.

<sup>355</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation Between the President and the Secretary of State, August 30, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:334-335.

whether, and if so what, steps should be taken to establish operating arrangements under an international system designed to assure the continuity of operation of the Suez Canal, as guaranteed by the convention of October 29, 1888, consistently with legitimate Egyptian interests, and to deal with any necessary financial and other ancillary measures.”<sup>356</sup> To do this, it was first necessary to identify Nasser’s motives for nationalizing the canal and then determine whether his actions violated the canal’s user agreement as this could help determine the leverage available in the negotiations to follow.

Constructed by the Suez Canal Company under the leadership of Ferdinand de Lesseps, the canal was an international undertaking financed by private shareholders.<sup>357</sup> This meant that the majority of shares were held by the French with Egypt possessing only 44% when the canal opened in 1869.<sup>358</sup> As such, the canal functioned much like a modern turnpike or toll road with revenue shared between stockholders. Over time, Egypt lost more stock in its canal as European firms - predominately British - purchased ever larger shares from Egyptians eager to cash in on their initial investment but, in the wake of the 1952 revolution, the Egyptian government began to gradually buy back shares in the canal. By 1956, Egypt was receiving approximately 40% of the canal’s revenue which amounted to approximately \$17,000,000 per year. To Nasser, this was a paltry sum that fell far short of the \$100,000,000 he believed the canal could generate for Egypt annually.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in the United Kingdom to the Department of State, August 16, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:203-205n4.

<sup>357</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 16-17.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>359</sup> Diary Entry by President Eisenhower, August 8, 1956, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President, 1953-1961 (Ann Whitman File), DDE Diary Series, Box 17, August 1956 Diary, Eisenhower Library.

Although privately owned, the canal was governed by the 1888 Suez Canal Convention which guaranteed international shipping rights for “all powers” provided they pay the requisite passage fees.<sup>360</sup> This further infuriated Nasser as he watched the world’s economy traverse his territory unencumbered while receiving less than half the revenue it generated. However, in seizing control of the canal, Nasser was careful to ensure that this flow continued with relatively few interruptions, thereby negating the most obvious justification for military intervention by Britain and France.<sup>361</sup> In doing, Nasser did not technically violate the provisions of the Suez Canal Convention; so long as shipping continued, there was nothing in the convention that prevented a private company from becoming public.<sup>362</sup> This frustrated the British and French but was a blessing to Dulles and Eisenhower who used the legality to rein in their allies long enough for the London Conference to formulate a response.

Recognizing their shaky legal grounds, the London Conference sought to broker a new Suez Canal Convention with Egypt that respected its sovereignty and offered more reasonable revenue sharing but would vest authority over canal operations in a multinational Suez Canal Board that protected use by all nations.<sup>363</sup> To accomplish this, the conference designated five representatives, led by the Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies, to travel to Cairo and present their plan to Nasser. As the Suez Committee prepared for its first meeting in Cairo, Dulles was optimistic about their prospects. He told Eisenhower that he was pleased with having recruited four non-Western countries - Ethiopia, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey - to endorse the Suez

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<sup>360</sup> Memorandum by Warren E. Hewitt of the Office of the Assistant Legal Adviser for United Nations Affairs, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:18-19.

<sup>361</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 72-73.

<sup>362</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in London to the Department of State, July 27, 1956, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President, 1953-1961 (Ann-Whitman File), Dulles-Herter Series, Box 7, Dulles, John Foster, July 1956, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>363</sup> Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:250-252.

Committee as “the program becomes not just a Western program but one with Asian and African support.”<sup>364</sup> Dulles’ obvious concern was ensuring that the Suez Committee did not come across as a veiled attempt by the old colonial powers to take back the Suez; a charge made by Soviet Foreign Minister Shepilov on the closing day of the London Conference.

However, Dulles neglected the fact that three of these nations (Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey) were Baghdad Pact members, a feature that likely undid any potential benefit from Nasser’s perspective. Dulles also downplayed that, despite their endorsement, the United States’ closest ally, the U.K., was unhappy with the Suez Committee’s mission and believed it did not present a firm enough response to Nasser.<sup>365</sup> Instead of a negotiation, Prime Minister Eden hoped the London Conference would have produced an ultimatum for Nasser and, after his rejection of it, war would become the next viable option. Because of this, he urged Dulles to ensure negotiations with Nasser were swift and tough, thereby lessening the chances for success.<sup>366</sup>

Eden was not alone in his displeasure with the outcome of the London Conference. The French Foreign Minister, Christian Pineau, waxed indignantly that the Suez Committee was doomed to fail and he recommended that planning begin immediately for the inevitable military action that would follow.<sup>367</sup> The Arab world also disapproved of the London Conference and several nations observed five minutes of silence for the “assassination of liberty.”<sup>368</sup> In a show of solidarity, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia all experienced 24 hours of labor strikes. Robert Anderson, by this time exploring Arab-Israeli peace options with

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<sup>364</sup> Message from the Secretary of State to the President, August 21, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:253-254.

<sup>365</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, August 19, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:233-235.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>367</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation between the Ambassador to France (Dillon) and Foreign Minister Pineau, August 20, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:248.

<sup>368</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 297.

the Saudis, had an audience with King Saud and Prince Faisal who applauded Nasser's move and characterized the London Conference as an attempt to undermine Egypt's sovereignty.<sup>369</sup> With the U.K., Russia, France, and Saudi Arabia each castigating the London Conference's program in their own way, the Suez Committee appeared doomed from the start.

Nasser was predictably unmoved by the Suez Committee and, although cordial, refused to acquiesce to key elements of their platform. In their final meeting on September 2, 1956, Nasser showed his resolve but was also relatively level headed and reasonable in his repudiation; telling the committee, "What is your problem? Freedom of navigation? I'm ready to discuss that. Tolls? I'm ready to discuss that. The British press charges that I'm trying to build an empire? We can discuss that too if you want, but I will not discuss Egyptian sovereignty."<sup>370</sup> To protect this sovereignty Nasser dismissed the idea of an international supervisory board and refused to relinquish the authority to determine toll charges but he assured the committee that he would continue to guarantee freedom of navigation for all nations, aside from Israel, through the canal.<sup>371</sup>

The Egyptian press was less forgiving and parodied the London Conference while taking a direct jab at Menzies. The daily *Al Akhbar* compared the Suez Committee's efforts to those of an urbane fashionista in London or Paris demanding the right to determine how the Australian sheep that provide the wool for his clothes are raised and maintained.<sup>372</sup> Nasser, at the height of his popularity across the Middle East, was portrayed as a hero for dismantling a vestige of colonialism and checking the West's ploy to reclaim their position. Defeated, the Suez

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<sup>369</sup> Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:301-303.

<sup>370</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 302-303.

<sup>371</sup> Memorandum from Robert Anderson to President Eisenhower, August 31, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, JFD Chronological Series, Box 14, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>372</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 302.

Committee returned to London for a second go at drafting an approach to the canal issue.

However, before they could finalize their plans, Israel, with the support of Britain and France, intervened in a manner that undermined the potential for a diplomatic solution.<sup>373</sup>

On October 29, 1956, Israel invaded Egypt across the Sinai and, four days later, it reached its objective when it secured the eastern shore of the Suez Canal.<sup>374</sup> With the hawkish Ben-Gurion at the helm, Israel had been anxious for an opportunity to preemptively defeat the Egyptian army before they could receive the bulk of the weapons promised in the previous year's arms deal with the Soviet Union. However, Israel's invasion was not a product of its own design. Instead, the operation was hatched by the British and French as a means for regaining control of the Suez Canal and undermining Nasser's nationalist strides.<sup>375</sup> According to the plan, once Israel invaded, the British and French would intervene as neutrals and demand a cease-fire; the Israelis would comply, but the Egyptians would refuse and this would provide the pretext for the British and French to enter the fray under the auspices of protecting the canal.<sup>376</sup>

On October 31, the British and French issued their cease-fire ultimatum demanding that both Egypt and Israel withdraw all military forces within ten miles of the Suez Canal. The audaciousness of this proposition cannot be understated. Had the Egyptians agreed, this would have placed their military approximately 110 miles inside their own border while leaving Israeli troops over 100 miles inside Egypt.<sup>377</sup> Not surprisingly, Nasser refused. On the night of October 31, the British and French initiated airstrikes and, five days later, on the eve of the U.S.

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<sup>373</sup> "A Diluted Plan," *London Times*, September 29, 1956, White House Central Files, Official File, 1953-1961, OF 116-GG "G" Big Four Conference, Box 504, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>374</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 37-38.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>376</sup> Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 378-379.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

presidential election, launched an amphibious assault and invasion of their own.<sup>378</sup> Meanwhile, Eisenhower and Dulles, caught completely off guard by the assault, scrambled to deescalate the situation.

Meeting at the White House on the evening of October 29, 1956, it quickly became clear to Eisenhower, Dulles, and the other advisers present that England and France were behind the Israeli invasion. The president was outraged at his European allies who, in the run-up to the invasion, had virtually ceased all diplomatic communications with the United States. He felt betrayed and described the action as a “double-cross.”<sup>379</sup> Emotions aside, Eisenhower and Dulles struggled with how to proceed. Their first stumbling block was whether to make good on their Tripartite obligation and intervene militarily on behalf of Egypt.<sup>380</sup> This would put them at odds with their allies - England, France, and Israel - and on the side of the Soviet Union; a course that Dulles was unwilling to accept. Despite this, Eisenhower was initially inclined to go this route, telling the cabinet:

If, however, the British get into this operation, they may open a deep rift between us. The President said we might indicate we are considering ways and means of redeeming our pledge to the Middle Eastern countries. If the British back the Israelis they may find us in opposition. He said he did not fancy helping Egypt in the present circumstances but he felt our word must be made good.<sup>381</sup>

One of the ways discussed to indicate the administration’s intent to stand up for Egypt was by calling a special session of Congress. With Congress retaining the authority to declare war this could send a strong message to Israel and her European conspirators to halt their operation.

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<sup>378</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 36-38.

<sup>379</sup> Memorandum of a Conference with the President, October 29, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:833-839.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*



However, it was instead decided to first take the matter before the U.N. and condemn Israeli aggression, demand their withdrawal, and make clear the U.S. position.<sup>382</sup>

The following day, October 30, 1956, Henry Cabot Lodge, the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council condemning Israel's invasion of Egypt and demanding their immediate withdrawal.<sup>383</sup> Forebodingly, the Soviet Union also submitted a draft resolution calling for Israel to withdraw from Egypt; however, Arkady Sobolev, the Soviet Ambassador, removed provisions of the U.S. resolution that sought to prevent member nations from intervening militarily in the conflict. In the debate surrounding these resolutions both England and France defended the Israeli invasion by characterizing it as a defensive operation in light of the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal.<sup>384</sup> They also stressed the need for Western intervention to end the hostilities and shared their plan to deploy forces to the canal zone if Israel and Egypt did not agree to a cease-fire by October 31. When the resolutions came to a vote, both England and France vetoed the U.S. and Soviet measures; marking the first time in its ten-year history that a Security Council member other than the Soviet Union vetoed a resolution.<sup>385</sup> Lodge then turned to the General Assembly where he passed the resolution as England and France were unable to block it. Although this failed to dislodge Israel from Egyptian territory, it garnered wide praise from across the Arab world with numerous telegraphs pouring into the White House. King Saud telegraphed Eisenhower to thank him stating:

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> United Nations Security Council, "The Palestine Question: Steps for the Immediate Cessation of the Military Action of Israel in Egypt, S/3710," October 30, 1956, accessed January 12, 2017, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/3710](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/3710).

<sup>384</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Security Council Official Records, 749th Meeting*, October 30, 1956, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, accessed January 12, 2017, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.749](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.749).

<sup>385</sup> "Security Council Veto List," Dag Hammarskjöld Library, last modified January 6, 2017, accessed January 12, 2017, <http://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick/>.

I have learned from the news the great concern shown by your excellency regarding the Jewish aggression on Egyptian territory and the efforts you have made in warning the aggressor that America will be on the side of the country encroached upon. This is to be considered a victory of the principles of justice which are supported by the United States whose policy is implemented by that noble man namely President Eisenhower who keeps his pledges and promises.<sup>386</sup>

King Saud's message reveals that Eisenhower was successful, at least initially, at indicating his principled stand with the victims of aggression in the Middle East but, this move placed him in a difficult position that reflected the significance of the situation beyond the future of the Suez Canal. Having signaled through the United Nations a willingness to side with Egypt, the Arab world was left hoping for tough measures, even military intervention, by the United States.<sup>387</sup> Instead, they heard offers of military assistance from the Soviet Union who, after England and France invaded on November 5, threatened London and Paris with nuclear weapons.<sup>388</sup> Although this was likely just bluster by the Soviets, Premier Nikolai Bulganin even went so far as to write Eisenhower urging that the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. work in concert to expel the British, French, and Israelis with military force if necessary.<sup>389</sup> But, Eisenhower had no intention to intervene militarily in the hostilities; not on behalf of Egypt and certainly not allied with the Soviet Union against England and France.<sup>390</sup> Doing so would play directly into Russian

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<sup>386</sup> Telegraph from King Saud to President Eisenhower, October 31, 1956, White House Central Files, Official File, 1953-1961, OF 116-GG "G" Big Four Conference, Box 504, OF 116-LL, Middle East-Suez Situation Involving Israel, Egypt, Great Britain and France (Beginning 10-29-56) (1), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>387</sup> Various Telegraphs, October 31 - November 2, 1956, White House Central Files, Official File, 1953-1961, OF 116-GG "G" Big Four Conference, Box 504, OF 116-LL, Middle East-Suez Situation Involving Israel, Egypt, Great Britain and France (Beginning 10-29-56) (1), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>388</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Department of State, November 5, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:1003-1007.

<sup>389</sup> Letter from Prime Minister Bulganin to President Eisenhower, November 5, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:993-994.

<sup>390</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 302<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, November 1, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 16:902-916.

hands by forever altering the United States' strategic alliance with western Europe, leaving it isolated in the face of future Soviet threats. However, in the absence of a strong response from the United States, the Soviet Union could exploit American unwillingness to halt Israeli aggression and win favor from Arab states furious at the West. Despite this risk, they decided to pursue a cease-fire through the United Nations while independently pressuring England, France, and Israel to withdraw their forces.<sup>391</sup>

Pursuing recourse through the United Nations paid off and on November 6 the General Assembly adopted Resolutions 997 and 998 which provided the framework for a cease-fire and authorized a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) to supervise and enforce a tenuous peace.<sup>392</sup> The deal was made palatable to Nasser by providing him with the authority to expel the UNEF as he so pleased.<sup>393</sup> With all parties agreeing to the cease-fire, England and France withdrew their forces from Egypt in December. Israel, however, proved to be much more stubborn and required considerable coaxing from Eisenhower before they agreed to evacuate their troops from Egyptian territory. To this extent, Eisenhower and Dulles warned Ben-Gurion that continued defiance of United Nation's efforts only destabilized the region and invited further Soviet entreaties that would bode disastrous for Israel.<sup>394</sup> Israel's continued presence on Egyptian territory prompted Eisenhower, in the veiled language of presidential communiques, to threaten to withhold critical aid.<sup>395</sup> Unfortunately, not even this was enough to dislodge the Israelis who

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<sup>391</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 206.

<sup>392</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Resolutions Adopted Without Reference to a Committee, Resolution 997 (ES-I) and Resolution 998 (ES-I)*, November 2-4, 1956, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/dag/docs/ares997-998e.pdf>.

<sup>393</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 207.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>395</sup> President Eisenhower Message to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, November 7, 1956, White House Central Files, Official File, 1953-1961, OF 116-GG "G" Big Four Conference, Box 504,

felt betrayed by their European allies quick reversal on the issue and were desperate to not walk away from their military adventure empty handed. Having occupied the Gaza Strip and the critical port of Sharm al-Sheik, Israel gained valuable bargaining chips it hoped could be used to extract security guarantees and enhanced navigation rights on the Suez Canal.<sup>396</sup>

Events escalated in the United Nations where pressure mounted for Israel to withdraw its forces. The General Assembly “deplored” Israel for refusing to comply with previous resolutions calling for their immediate withdraw and adopted a series of resolutions demanding that the Secretary-General take action to remedy the situation.<sup>397</sup> By early 1957 the Eisenhower administration was facing the uncomfortable prospect of whether to support sanctions against Israel in the U.N., a prospect that Lodge derided as, “a very rough ride.”<sup>398</sup> As the primary provider of aid to Israel, sanctions would seriously damage the U.S.-Israel relationship; however, if the administration voted against the sanctions they would undoubtedly lose favor throughout the Arab world and, even greater, the emerging Third World. This dilemma was compounded by the fact that the United States had come down on the side of sanctions against Israel in the resolutions it submitted at the outset of the crisis in October 1956.<sup>399</sup> With the cease-fire holding and the UNEF on the ground, Eisenhower and Dulles initially sought to delay sanctions against

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OF 116-LL, Middle East-Suez Situation Involving Israel, Egypt, Great Britain and France (Beginning 10-29-56) (1), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>396</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 210-212.

<sup>397</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Resolutions Adopted by the General Assembly from 12 November 1956 to 8 March 1957 during its Eleventh Session*, Official Records, 11th sess., supplement no. 17, A/3572 (New York: UN, 1985), accessed January 26, 2017, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/3572\(supp\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/3572(supp)).

<sup>398</sup> Telegram from the Mission at the United Nations to the Department of State, January 15, 1957, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, vol. 17, *Arab-Israeli Dispute 1957*, ed. John P. Glennon and Nina J. Noring (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 37-38.

<sup>399</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 214.

Israel with the hope that they could pressure Ben-Gurion to withdraw from Sharm al-Sheik and Gaza. To stall, Lodge argued at the U.N. that sanctions against Israel were unjust given that Egypt too was in violation of Security Council Resolutions by their prohibition of Israeli transit through the Suez and their numerous raids into Israeli territory.<sup>400</sup> Simultaneously, Israel was warned that if it did not withdraw the United States would have no recourse but to endorse sanctions at the U.N.<sup>401</sup> Eisenhower personally expressed this sentiment to Ben-Gurion again in early February with the hope that he could persuade Israel to withdraw its remaining forces.<sup>402</sup> However, this delaying tactic could only be maintained for so long and, as Israel remained defiant, Eisenhower realized he had to take a stand.

On February 20, 1957, Eisenhower, in a nationally televised address, explained to the nation why he was willing to act decisively through the United Nations to force Israel's compliance. In his address, the president cited both moral rectitude and the importance of a strong and capable United Nations as motives for his decision to support sanctions.

Israel seeks something more. It insists on firm guarantees as a condition to withdrawing its forces of invasion. This raises a basic question of principle. Should a nation which attacks and occupies foreign territory in the face of United Nations disapproval be allowed to impose conditions on its own withdrawal?

I do not, myself, see how this could be reconciled with the Charter of the United Nations. The basic pledge of all the members of the United Nations is that they will settle their international disputes by peaceful means, and will not use force against the territorial integrity of another state.

But the United Nations faces immediately the problem of what to do next. If it does nothing, it accepts the ignoring of its repeated resolutions calling for the withdrawal of invading forces, then it will have admitted failure. That failure would be a blow to the authority and influence of the United Nations in the world

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<sup>400</sup> Telegram from the Department of State to the Mission at the United Nations, January 23, 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 17:44.

<sup>401</sup> Message from the Representative at the United Nations (Lodge) to the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs (Wilcox), January 24, 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 17:53-54.

<sup>402</sup> Message from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, February 3, 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 17:82-84.

and to the hopes which humanity placed in the United Nations as the means of achieving peace with justice.<sup>403</sup>

In presenting his case to the American public, Eisenhower again revealed a principled and pragmatic approach to diplomacy. He stressed the principled position of standing up to armed aggression, even when it stemmed from an ally; he also emphasized the important role of U.S. support for the United Nations in the face of Soviet aggression. In a bipartisan meeting with members of congress, Eisenhower further clarified his decision to endorse sanctions against Israel. He argued that failing to support the United Nations would erode U.S. influence in the Middle East, derail efforts at establishing a lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors, and, when future conflicts arose, a neutered U.N. would be unable to provide an alternative to the use of force. In a bleak prognostication, the president cautioned that, “Such a situation could lead to increased influence of Russia in Arab states, interruption of the flow of oil through the remaining pipeline and continued blocking of the Canal, the threat of a serious crash in the French and United Kingdom economies, and finally an increased possibility of general war.”<sup>404</sup>

Dulles too stressed the importance of coming down hard on Israel should it refuse to heed the United Nations; he calculated that failing to do so would seriously damage the U.S. image among Arab states and open the door to additional Soviet entreaties in the region. He told Eisenhower that a continuation of their effete cajoling towards Israel would “almost surely jeopardize the entire Western influence in the Middle East and make it almost certain that virtually all of the Middle East countries would feel that United States policy toward the area was in the last analysis controlled by the Jewish influence in the United States and that

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<sup>403</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Radio and Television Address to the American People on the Situation in the Middle East,” February 20, 1957, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed January 25, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10980&st=&st1=>

<sup>404</sup> Record of Bipartisan Legislative Meeting, February 20, 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 17:214-224.

accordingly the only hope of the Arab countries was in association with the Soviet Union.”<sup>405</sup> Luckily, Eisenhower’s public admonition on February 20 paid off and, believing the United States was firm in its position on sanctions, Israel withdrew its remaining forces from Egyptian territory in the first week of March.<sup>406</sup> With the Suez Crisis resolved, the Eisenhower administration was finally able to reassess its Middle East policy and figure out where it had gone wrong. However, well before the sands had settled over Sinai, Dulles realized that a dramatic change was needed if the United States was to survive and win in the Cold War’s hottest battleground.

Dulles and the State Department began formulating the doctrine that would eventually bear the president’s name as early as November 1956.<sup>407</sup> The Eisenhower Doctrine, as it came to be known, was not a complete departure from the administration’s previous policy in the Middle East, however, it differed in two significant regards. First, whereas before aid packages offered as part of Johnston’s Jordan Valley Project and Anderson’s Operation Alpha were conditioned on Arab states accommodating Israel, under the Eisenhower Doctrine, conditions concerning Israel were dropped and aid was made available to any Middle East state made at risk by Communism. This was the essence of realpolitik. To stabilize the region and advance a containment strategy, the administration abandoned any ideological attachment to peace. Second, Eisenhower placed the U.S. military behind his new doctrine and proposed intervening on behalf

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<sup>405</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation with the President, February 16, 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 17:178-180.

<sup>406</sup> Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 216.

<sup>407</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation with the President, December 3, 1956, Papers of John Foster Dulles, White House Memoranda Series, Box 4, Meetings with the President August thru December 1956 (2), Eisenhower Library.

of nations threatened by “overt armed aggression.”<sup>408</sup> As such, the doctrine marked the administration’s realization that it needed a more robust method of improving its influence in the region and that attempting to do so by fostering peace between Israel and its neighbors was placing it at risk of losing Cold War allies to the Soviet Union. Instead, aid would flow to Arab nations without strings attached to Israel and, in this light, it was hoped that they would remain in a Western orbit while resisting Soviet overtures.

The Soviet-Egyptian arms deal and the subsequent nationalization of the Suez Canal were interpreted by the administration as very real defeats in their Cold War contest with Russia and the Eisenhower Doctrine was meant to halt Communism’s advance across the desert. To prevent the Soviet Union from encroaching in the region, the Eisenhower Doctrine employed a form of realpolitik intended to purchase influence and improve resistance to Communism. From a transactional perspective, this new doctrine presented the seller (Arab nations) with a much better deal as the aid they received would no longer be conditioned on their relationship with Israel. For the buyer (the U.S.) the transaction became more costly as it received less for the dollar than it had before. The doctrine was risky and Eisenhower made a serious concession in driving it forward. Previous deals held out the prospect of peace for the region, an important ingredient for a successful containment strategy. However, under the Eisenhower Doctrine, the U.S. relinquished its hope of constructing a lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors in favor of a more feasible, albeit brittle, means of preventing “Communist aggression.”<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, “U.S. Role in the Middle East,” address to the U.S. Congress, January 5, 1957, Council on Foreign Relations, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.cfr.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/president-eisenhowers-speech-us-role-middle-east-eisenhower-doctrine-1957/p24130>.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.



As the doctrine neared completion, the State Department began preparing for its reception in the Middle East. In a hand-written post-script on the bottom of a cable sent from Dulles to Ambassador Byroade, the Secretary of State stressed the importance of the administration's new "no strings attached" approach. "It should be emphasized," wrote Dulles, "that when America, through bilateral or multilateral agreements, provides help of any kind to another, it does so without seeking special advantages or influence over them."<sup>410</sup> Dulles also made preparations on the domestic front as the doctrine needed congressional approval for the \$200,000,000 in aid it required.

In a meeting with the former Senate Majority Leader, William Knowland, Dulles explained the purpose and reason behind the administration's new doctrine. He pointed to the Suez Crisis as an indication that U.S. influence in the region had faltered and "the United States must make its presence more strongly felt in the area."<sup>411</sup> In highlighting the advantages of the proposed doctrine, Dulles described the bilateral nature of potential agreements as providing maneuverability for the administration's foreign policy. He stressed that the aid was intended "to bolster the military defense abilities and economies of countries whose governments showed a determination to combat Communist infiltration."<sup>412</sup> Senator Knowland agreed with his reasoning and believed the course was much more feasible than other options, such as joining the Baghdad Pact, that Dulles presented. Comfortable with its reception at home and abroad, Dulles was ready to pitch the concept to the president.

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<sup>410</sup> Cable from Secretary of State to American Embassy Cairo, December 19, 1956, Papers of John Foster Dulles, White House Memoranda Series, Box 4, Meetings with the President August thru December 1956 (1), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>411</sup> Memorandum of Conversation with Senator Knowland, December 9, 1956, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1951-1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memos of Conversation - General J Through K (2), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

Eisenhower was largely pleased with the initial draft of the doctrine he received on December 22, 1956 and made only minor changes to it.<sup>413</sup> Emblematic of their relationship, his revisions support the notion that he had to reel in his energetic and, at times, fiery Secretary of State. He revised language that characterized the United Nations as “undependable” and emphasized the willingness by which the United States stood up to its allies, England and France, during the recent crisis.<sup>414</sup> He also softened the harsh tone directed at the Arab states whom Dulles characterized as weak and divided. Having refined the draft, Eisenhower presented it to Congress on January 5, 1957 and Joint Resolution 117, optimistically titled “Promote Peace and Stability in the Middle East,” passed on March 9, 1957.

The purpose of this thesis is not to assess the efficacy of the Eisenhower Doctrine, instead, it is intended to demonstrate that the administration dedicated large sums of aid and energy to improving its influence in the Middle East as a method of compensating for its cumbersome association with Israel. To develop a comprehensive picture of the administration’s reliance on monetary aid as leverage, it is important to examine the funds allocated under the Eisenhower Doctrine and then place that aid in context with the sums allotted under the JVP program and Operation Alpha.

The Eisenhower Doctrine, or Joint Resolution 117, required semi-annual reports to congress on the program’s progress and fiscal details. Judging from the amounts allocated the State Department wasted no time in exercising the new doctrine throughout the region. These reports place the program’s total cost at approximately \$214,800,000; with \$122,800,000 allotted

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<sup>413</sup> Memorandum of Conversation with the President, December 22, 1956, Papers of John Foster Dulles, White House Memoranda Series, Box 4, Meetings with the President August thru December 1956 (1), Eisenhower Library.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

for economic development, \$51,100,000 for direct military investment, and \$40,900,000 in contributions to the UNEF.<sup>415</sup> Funds were distributed across fifteen nations that comprised the soft underbelly of the Communist juggernaut to the north. Disposition was directed largely by Ambassador James Richards who was selected by Eisenhower to negotiate with each recipient. Unlike the funds allocated for the Jordan Valley Project (\$200,000,000) and Operation Alpha (\$545,000,000), which were earmarked but never distributed, the \$214,800,000 allotted under the Eisenhower Doctrine was distributed in the form of economic aid and military hardware between 1957 and 1960. This further supports the notion that, between 1952 and 1957, the Eisenhower administration became increasingly desperate to improve its image and influence in the Middle East; however, by 1957, they rejected the notion that this was possible by brokering peace between Israel and its neighbors. Whereas aid offered under the Jordan Valley Project and Operation Alpha was conditioned on Arab states reaching a peace deal with Israel, the \$214,800,000 spent under the Eisenhower Doctrine bought them no such accord.

### *Conclusion*

The Eisenhower administration's pivot to the Arabs grew out of a fear that its association with Israel was undermining its Cold War objectives and jeopardizing its most coveted interest in the region: oil. This pivot was lineal in nature and escalated to the point of desperation by the start of Eisenhower's second term. Greeted in 1953 by reports of faltering U.S. prestige, the administration responded by dispatching Eric Johnston on a mission to forge a practical solution to water disputes between Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Resting their hopes for improved

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<sup>415</sup> Report by the International Cooperation Administration for General A.J. Goodpaster, July 31, 1957, and Report to the Congress of the United States, March 5, 1958, OF 116-MM, Middle East Doctrine, 1/5/57 (1), Eisenhower Library; Memorandum for the President, July 29, 1960, White House Central Files, Official File, 1953-1961, OF 116-GG "G" Big Four Conference, Box 504, OF 116-MM, Middle East Doctrine, 1/5/57 (2), Eisenhower Library.

influence on their ability to broker peace between Israel and its neighbors, the administration also saw peace and stability as a hedge against Soviet meddling in the region. Johnston's mission marked the administration's earliest attempt at using economic aid as leverage when he offered \$200,000,000 in economic aid as inducements.<sup>416</sup>

With Johnston coming up empty handed, Dulles hatched Operation Alpha as a bilateral attempt at fostering peace between Israel and Egypt. This program took on increased urgency in the wake of the 1955 Soviet-Egyptian arms deal and Eisenhower personally charged the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Robert Anderson, with seeing the operation through. Despite his impressive authorization to offer up to \$545,000,000 in economic and military aid, Anderson was unable to entice either Israel or Egypt to a deal and, after the administration withdrew its offer to finance the Aswan Dam, Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal only further heightened the situation.<sup>417</sup> The ensuing Suez Crisis threatened to turn the Cold war hot and drove Eisenhower and Dulles to abandon their previous policy of conditioning economic and military aid on peace with Israel. Interpreting the crisis as the manifestation of Soviet encroachment in the Middle East, the Eisenhower Doctrine employed a form of realpolitik to prevent the region from slipping further under Communist influence and nearly \$215,000,000 in aid was delivered to at risk nations.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Department of State, March 16, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:109-112.

<sup>417</sup> Memorandum from Francis H. Russel to the Secretary of State, Summary Statement of Alpha Proposals, May 18, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:200-204.

<sup>418</sup> Report by the International Cooperation Administration for General A.J. Goodpaster, July 31, 1957, and Report to the Congress of the United States, March 5, 1958, OF 116-MM, Middle East Doctrine, 1/5/57 (1), Eisenhower Library; Memorandum for the President, July 29, 1960, White House Central Files, Official File, 1953-1961, OF 116-GG "G" Big Four Conference, Box 504, OF 116-MM, Middle East Doctrine, 1/5/57 (2), Eisenhower Library.

Although ultimately unable to achieve his goal of improving U.S. prestige by brokering peace in the region, Eisenhower remained steadfast in his adherence to a principled and pragmatic foreign policy. He and Dulles saw their Middle East problem as stemming from America's relationship Israel and, recognizing that this presented a potential conflict with the nation's wider Cold War interests, they worked hard to present practical solutions to regional disputes without interference from domestic politics. From his early threat of withholding economic aid from Israel if it did not stop construction at Banat Yaacov, to his initial inclination to honor the Tripartite obligation and intervene on behalf of Egypt during the Suez Crisis, Eisenhower was guided by a morality that reflected his military upbringing. At its center, these values coalesced around honor, and Eisenhower strove to outline a foreign policy that recognized America's commitment to doing what was morally right, even if this meant alienating its closest allies. However, this principled approach never clouded his pragmatism or obstructed his ability to pursue foreign policy objectives that served America's interests. While examples are many, the pivot towards the Arab states stands as the greatest testament to Eisenhower's commitment to a practical foreign policy bent on delivering Cold War national security objectives. Recognizing the importance of Arab oil and determined to contain the spread of Communism, Eisenhower and Dulles worked tirelessly to develop a Middle East policy that cast the United States as an objective and dependable alternative to the Soviet Union. Despite suffering several setbacks, the administration persevered and modestly improved the U.S. image in the region, albeit at a relatively high cost.

## CONCLUSION

I am proud of my part in the creation of this new state. Our government was the first to recognize the State of Israel... I hope that whoever follows me in the Presidency will continue to give our country's fullest support to our technical assistance program not only in Israel but throughout the entire Near East.<sup>419</sup>

Harry S. Truman  
October 17, 1952

Israel appeared to be carrying on a form of political warfare against this Administration; that Israel had seemed to be entirely self-centered, there being no evidence that the Israel Government had given any consideration whatsoever to the vital interests of the NATO countries in maintaining accessibility to the oil and other resources of the Middle East... The political campaign being waged by the Israelis against the Administration does not make the situation easier; not, primarily because of the domestic aspects of it but because of the great obstacles it creates to efforts to save the Middle East from Soviet domination.<sup>420</sup>

John Foster Dulles  
March 2, 1956

Perhaps no other international relationship has been the subject of such enduring public scrutiny as that of the United States and Israel. President Obama's embarrassing rift with the Republican Congress over Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit in March 2015 was just the latest episode in the United States' tenuous relationship with Israel. The incident highlighted the divisiveness of the relationship with Israel both at home, in the halls of Congress, and abroad, around the diplomatic negotiating table. In fact, this relationship and its reverberations threaten to once again alter the status of affairs in the Middle East as initial reports indicate that Israeli plans to expand settlements in the West Bank were motivated by Donald Trump's election and his administration's promise to "grow closer with Israel to make sure that it gets the full respect

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<sup>419</sup> Harry S. Truman, "Address Prepared for Delivery Before the Mobilization Conference of the National Jewish Welfare Board," October 17, 1952, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed February 2, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14302&st=&st1=>.

<sup>420</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, March 2, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 15:276-281.

that it deserves in the Middle East.”<sup>421</sup> Although impossible to prognosticate on the future implications of U.S.-Israeli relations, the past indicates that America’s support for Israel has, quite often, been at odds with its wider interests, and it was the purpose of this thesis to examine just the first chapter in this lengthy affair.

To properly understand this conflict, it was necessary to first examine the factors that drove President Truman to quickly recognize the young nation after Jewish settlers defied the United Nations and declared statehood. Entering office unexpectedly in 1945, Truman was initially reluctant to espouse outright support for an independent Jewish state and sought, instead, to arbitrate the Palestine conflict through the United Nations. However, as pressures mounted, Truman struck out against the advice of his State Department and recognized Israel only hours after it declared statehood in May 1948. Several factors, including post-Holocaust sympathy for European Jews and the Zionist lobby, played important parts in persuading Truman to change his position in favor of Israel but, the 1948 presidential election stands as the primary reason for this shift. Truman’s actions on the eve of the election only confirm the political motive for his support of Israel outlined in the campaign strategy a year earlier.<sup>422</sup> With actions echoing louder than words, Truman’s rejection of the U.N. sponsored Bernadotte Plan, ten days prior to the election, most clearly signal his reason for recognizing Israel.<sup>423</sup> Although he lost New York, Truman won the election and, consumed by the Korean War, he had little time or energy for the

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<sup>421</sup> Isabel Kershner, “Emboldened by Trump, Israel Approves a Wave of West Bank Settlement Expansion,” *The New York Times*, January 24, 2017.

<sup>422</sup> Memorandum, Clark Clifford to Harry S. Truman, November 19, 1947, Clifford Papers, Political File, Box 22, Confidential Memo to the President [Clifford-Rowe Memorandum], Truman Library.

<sup>423</sup> Harry S. Truman, “Statement by the President on Israel,” October 24, 1948, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed March 19, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=13065&st=Dewey&st1=Israel>.

Middle East during his second term. Instead, it would be up to his successor to forge new policy in the region and shore up the third, neglected front in the Cold War.

The international landscape facing President Eisenhower when he entered office in January 1953 was daunting. As the dying European empires made painful and often violent attempts to hold on to their colonial possessions a new struggle materialized as the Soviet Union and the United States competed for the allegiance of the emerging Third World. To many it looked like the Soviet Union, under the new direction of Nikita Krushchev, was edging out the United States in this contest. In Asia, it appeared that democracy was at risk of being driven into the Pacific Ocean; U.N. forces were unable to defeat the Communists on the Korean Peninsula and Mao Zedong cemented his victory over the Kuomintang and declared the People's Republic of China in October 1949. In eastern Europe, Russia brutally suppressed democratic resistance in Hungary to hold Warsaw Pact together. Likewise, the Middle East presented its own brand of crisis as nationalist leaders, like Gamal Abdel Nasser, and movements, like the Algerian National Liberation Front, upended the previous balance of power in the region. Fearing this instability would invite Soviet meddling, but unwilling to resort to force like their Cold War adversary, the incoming administration realized that a renewed diplomatic emphasis was needed if the West was going to maintain its vital lifeline to Middle East oil.

The Eisenhower administration sincerely believed that Truman's recognition of Israel and his willingness to play politics with the issue cost the United States prestige among the Arabs. To combat this degradation Eisenhower and Dulles attempted to craft a foreign policy that presented the United States as an objective and principled actor in the region. The first step in achieving this objective lie in fostering peace between Israel and its neighbors, thereby reducing tension and improving stability to stave off Soviet overtures. Eric Johnston was the first in the



administration to take up the mantle of peace as he attempted to broker a practical, multilateral water sharing accord between Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Armed with \$200,000,000 in incentives, Johnston was unable to produce a deal that all sides could agree on. Stymied by the complexities of multilateral negotiations, the administration next sought to harness the popularity of the region's newest leader, Nasser, and draft a bilateral settlement between Egypt and Israel that, in time, other nations could get behind. However, this course took a dramatic turn in the wake of Nasser's 1955 arms deal with the Soviet Union and, in one last attempt to draw Nasser back to the table, Eisenhower dispatched his Deputy Secretary of Defense to take the lead on Operation Alpha. Although given a startling amount of aid to lure Ben-Gurion and Nasser to an agreement, Dulles' decision to withdraw U.S. support for the Aswan Dam soured the deal for the Egyptian president and Operation Alpha was scuttled in July 1956 when Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal.

The crisis that ensued threatened to turn the Cold War hot as old alliances were tested and the world's military behemoths, the United States and the U.S.S.R., prepared for war. For Eisenhower and Dulles, the Suez Crisis spurred the realization that a new approach was needed if the West was going to hold on to its coveted supply of Middle East oil. To them, the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal, the nationalization of the Suez Canal, and Shepilov's commitment to finance the Aswan Dam heralded the dawn of Soviet intervention in a historically Western sphere and was a definitive blow to the strategy of containment. Despite the combined \$745,000,000 in aid offered between Johnston's JVP deal and Operation Alpha, conditioning it on a settlement with Israel proved too repugnant for Arab leaders of the day. Recognizing this, the Eisenhower Doctrine jettisoned the requirement for peace with Israel and, instead, offered aid freely to nations imperiled by the threat of Communism.

The lineal descent of the United States' stature in the Middle East, from the perception of faltering prestige to the reality of the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal and the Suez Crisis, was accompanied by a loosening of the purse strings that reached its zenith under the Eisenhower Doctrine. Whether real or perceived, Eisenhower and Dulles were convinced that at the root of their troubles lie "that flaming antagonism" spawned from Truman's early support for Israel.<sup>424</sup> In the end, the two salvaged a modicum of influence in the region, maintained the West's access to oil, and forestalled Soviet expansion but at a cost much higher than originally planned. Gone were their aspirations for becoming the harbingers of peace in the region and, instead, Eisenhower and Dulles relied on a *realpolitik* approach to shore up support and cultivate influence. The tireless efforts of senior diplomats like Henry Byroade, Eric Johnston, and Robert Anderson, and the generous aid they offered, serve as the bill paid by the Eisenhower administration for the seismic foreign policy decision made by Truman. Viewed in this context, the relationship with Israel initiated by Truman stood at odds with the nation's Cold War interests; specifically, securing a supply of oil for western Europe and preventing Soviet inroads in the Middle East. More broadly, it is indicative of a conflict, and a means of addressing it, that exists to this day.

This study was relational in nature and sought to examine the motive and impact of one president's decision on the policy objectives of his successor. As such, there is ample ground for further scholarship on the subject. In addition to assessing the efficacy of the Eisenhower Doctrine, which has been thoroughly studied, options abound for a comparative analysis of the

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<sup>424</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation with the Secretary of State, October 18, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 14:612; Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 186.

doctrine with its predecessor, the Truman Doctrine.<sup>425</sup> The two programs share a tone and intent that beg for a comparative analysis that would contribute greatly to our understanding of early Cold War foreign policy. There is also fertile academic ground to explore Soviet interpretations of the Suez Crisis and the ensuing Eisenhower Doctrine, something this text neglected. Recent scholarship by the former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov presents a detailed, if slightly skewed, assessment of the Cold War battle over the Middle East from the 1950s to present and, drawing on his research, other scholars could provide alternative perspectives.<sup>426</sup> Finally, a comprehensive examination of the policies crafted by subsequent administrations to navigate the complexities of America's relationship with Israel across the wider Middle East offers perhaps the most relevant and applicable potential for study. With vast reservoirs of source material available the field presents untold opportunities to explore America's relationship with the Middle East beyond two men and the politics and pragmatism that steered their decisions.

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<sup>425</sup> Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>426</sup> Mark N. Katz, review of Yevgeny Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present*, trans. Paul Gould (New York: Basic Books, 2009), *Middle East Policy* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2009), accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.mepc.org/create-content/book-review/russia-and-arabs-behind-scenes-middle-east-cold-war-present>.

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