

# LACK OF WILL OR FORCED BY CIRCUMSTANCES?

US COMPREHENSIVE PEACE INITIATIVES IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT  
BETWEEN 1956 AND 1967

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## Introduction

The 1956 war in the Middle East started with the Sinai campaign, a surprise military attack on Egypt on 29 October. On the surface, Israel led the campaign, but Britain and France secretly backed it. In reality, the war was a result of a French-British-Israeli conspiracy to oust the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser. In July 1956 Nasser had nationalised the Suez Canal, a strategic necessity for the colonial powers' influence in the region. Without absolute access to the canal, Britain feared that its hegemony in the Middle East would end. France saw the Arab nationalism Nasser promoted as a threat to its own position in the region, notably in Algeria. Israel too had its own regional position to consider. Diminishing Egypt's role and avoiding further spreading of Arab nationalism was an important incentive for Israel to go to war.<sup>1</sup>

The secret allies' military success in the war was imminent; within days Israel controlled Sinai and Gaza, while France and Britain again controlled the Suez Canal. However, the occupation was to be short-lived, largely because of pressure from the superpowers, particularly from the US administration. The United States had not been informed of the plot against Egypt, and was taken by surprise, as it had not expected an invasion.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the United States did not want war in the Middle East, as the conflict was considered "a problem demanding a solution".<sup>3</sup> In order to end the 1956 war, the superpower was forced to choose between two evils: Either the USA would have to oppose its allies Britain, France and Israel; or it might face the possibility of Soviet involvement in the war and thus in the region.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shlaim, Avi. 2000:169, 176-179. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.

<sup>2</sup> Hahn, Peter L. 2004:203. *Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1945-1961*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press.

<sup>3</sup> Hahn 2004:276.

<sup>4</sup> Hahn 2004:203-206.

US President Dwight D. Eisenhower chose to take a firm stand against the aggressors. First, he forced the colonial powers to back down; then Israel too had to withdraw its forces. In the end, there were no territorial changes, but the 1956 war still had lasting effects, especially in terms of a new balance of power. In many ways, the 1956 war was “[t]he template for the 1967 war.”<sup>5</sup>

The causes for the war in 1967 were largely the same as they had been in 1956. The background for the 1967 war was Arab-Israeli rivalry in the region, as it had been eleven years earlier. Again, actions by the Egyptian President Nasser were important triggers for the conflict. However, there is an ongoing discussion whether these actions unintentionally set forth a development that inevitably led to a war nobody wanted, or if Nasser’s actions only were the pretext needed by Israeli hawks who favoured war over a diplomatic solution. Scholar and Israeli ambassador to the United States, Michael B. Oren, describes the 1967 war as a war no one wanted, but several incidents – notably those caused by Egypt – escalated the conflict until Israeli leaders felt forced to strike a pre-emptive attack. While many historians disagree that the 1967 war almost exclusively can be blamed on Nasser, there has in previous research largely been a consensus that the war was a result of a conflict spiral no one was able to control. Senior Researcher Roland Popp disputes this, arguing with backing in recently declassified archive material that the military leadership in Israel believed a diplomatic solution would not favour Israel, and thus convinced the civil leaders that a military strike was the best option for the Jewish state.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of the participants’ intentions, it remains a fact that the conflict turned to war on 5 June 1967. In the weeks prior to the outbreak of war, Egypt evicted the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) from the Sinai Peninsula, and followed this move by transporting a significant amount of Egyptian troops there. Finally, Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping in May 1967. Since the access to the Straits of Tiran was Israel’s main military gain of the 1956 war, the closing of them was particularly objectionable to the Israelis. Even before this, however, Israel was preparing for war and making public threats to Syria.<sup>7</sup>

The 1967 war, like that in 1956, started with a highly successful Israeli surprise attack. Within hours of the first day of the war, Israel had destroyed the Egyptian air force. Later the

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<sup>5</sup> Woollacott, Martin. 2006:6. *After Suez: Adrift in the American Century*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris.

<sup>6</sup> Oren, Michael B. 2002:32, 92-126. *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. New York: Oxford University Press; Shlaim 2000:236-241; Popp, Roland. 2006:296-298. “Stumbling Decidedly into the Six-Day War” in *Middle East Journal*, vol. 60, no. 2, spring 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Shlaim 2000:236-237; Popp 2006:284-285.

same day, Israel also wiped out the air forces of Syria and Jordan, and a significant part of the Iraqi air force.<sup>8</sup>

The war lasted for six days. At the end of the sixth day, Israel controlled the Sinai Peninsula; Gaza; the West Bank, with the old city of Jerusalem; and the Golan Heights. Unlike in the aftermath of the 1956 war, the United States did not force Israel to give up its territorial gains. What had changed during these years that made the United States transform their policy towards the ongoing conflict? Was it a result of a change in internal and external circumstances; a conscious choice made by the US administrations in question; or a combination? Most importantly, why did the United States not attempt to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East by initiating a comprehensive peace negotiation between the 1956 and 1967 wars, but instead allow the situation to evolve into another war, eleven years later?

***“United States objectives are best served by peace, political stability and economic and social progress in the Middle East.”<sup>9</sup>***

For more than sixty years, one of the major concerns in international relations has been the difficulty of creating peace and stability in the Middle East. This has been a foreign policy goal of all the US governments since World War Two, yet none has proved capable of creating a lasting, comprehensive peace in the volatile region. One of the central formative eras for the modern Middle East was between the two wars in 1956 and 1967. This was also one of the essential epochs for forming US policy towards the region, illustrated by the significantly different approaches US authorities had to the two wars.

All three administrations had one basic idea in common: stability in the Middle East was desirable for the United States, and the US needed to take the necessary means to ensure such stability. However, the means to achieve this shifted throughout the period. One possible explanation as to why the US did not initiate a peace process after 1956 is that they had other commitments. It was in their interest to obtain a stable balance of power in the Middle East, but not necessarily peace. The objective was that no Middle Eastern state or the Soviet Union, would gain a hegemonic status, which would affect US political, economical and strategic interests. The initiatives the US took between the 1956 war and the new outbreak in 1967 were meant to avoid war, but not necessarily to create peace.

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<sup>8</sup> Shlaim 2000:241.

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum for the President, 21 November 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2548.

In order to answer the above-posed research questions, it will be essential to take a closer look at the main shaping force of US foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s: the Cold War framework. The Cold War demanded attention and resources from the United States. Increasingly between 1956 and 1967, the US became engaged in wars and strategic combat operations around the world, most notably the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War.<sup>10</sup> These and other incidents prevented the US administrations from focusing on the Middle East. However, the Cold War was also part of the driving force for the US policy in the Middle East. The potential threat of the Soviet Union was at the centre of US foreign policy making throughout the Cold War, and the Soviet Union's attempt at establishing a base of support in the Middle East was perceived as a considerable problem for the United States.

There appear to be no serious or successful US attempts at creating a lasting comprehensive peace in the Middle East between 1956 and 1967. Before discussing why the US did not take such measures it is pertinent to clarify why it should, or perhaps more accurately, why it would want to. The Americans saw it as being in their interest to involve themselves in these conflicts, and they saw it as their interest to maintain stability in the situation in the Middle East. The recurring goal throughout the period was to keep the Soviet Union out of the Middle East. Containment of communism was a global aspiration for the US during the Cold War, and the Middle East was considered a particularly dangerous playing field because of the lingering instability in the region. By creating peace, the Americans hoped to keep communism at bay.<sup>11</sup>

Especially in Syria, the Americans suspected that the Soviet Union attempted to gain control, for instance by supplying Syria with arms.<sup>12</sup> The Soviet Union also supplied Egypt and Iraq with financial aid and weapons. This conduct built up under American suspicions of the Soviet Union's intentions in the Middle East. However, it can be argued that the Western fear of Soviet influence in the Middle East generally, and in Egypt specifically, was exaggerated. The Soviet Union failed to make any Eastern Europe-style puppet states, and the relationship between Nasser and the Kremlin was at times strained; for instance, when Nasser illegalized the Egyptian Communist Party.<sup>13</sup> It also seems evident in retrospect that Nasser

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<sup>10</sup> For an account of the US interventions and engagements during the Cold War, see Lundestad, Geir. 1999. "'Empire by Invitation' in the American Century" in *Diplomatic History*, vol. 23. 2/1999.

<sup>11</sup> Hahn 2004:1.

<sup>12</sup> Shlaim 2000:190.

<sup>13</sup> Petersen, Tore T. 2006:12-13. *The Decline of the Anglo-American Middle East 1961-1969: A Willing Retreat*. Brighton/Portland: Sussex Academic Press.

and other actors in the region consciously tried to use the American fear of Soviet expansion in the Middle East to influence the direction of US policy.<sup>14</sup>

As peace proved elusive, however, the US policy towards active peacemaking changed. If forced to choose, the US government picked containment over peace. US hegemony over a volatile Middle East was preferable to a peaceful, but potentially communist region. Thus, US interests no longer were in accordance with comprehensive peacemaking. Because the Cold War was more important than peace in the Middle East, the Eisenhower administration did not hesitate to sacrifice comprehensive peace for its own Cold War aims when the two conflicted.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, the relationship between the US and Israel developed, again largely as a result of US Cold War aims. It became useful for the US to have a friend and ally in the Middle East. However, the relationship between Israel and the US was not altogether good throughout this period. Eisenhower was considered by many to be less Israel-friendly than his predecessor, and subsequent history has shown him as less Israel-friendly than any later US presidents. Among the issues straining the relationship between Israel and the US were the US's even-handed policy towards the protagonists in the Arab-Israeli conflict; Eisenhower's refusal to accept the Israeli occupation of Egyptian territory after the 1956 war; and the consequent refusal by the Eisenhower administration to directly sell weapons to Israel.<sup>16</sup>

Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford, Avi Shlaim, argues that there are three main reasons why the Eisenhower administration refused to supply Israel with sophisticated arms. First, the US wanted to keep the military balance stable, and they already considered Israel the strongest actor in the region. Secondly, the US administration wanted Arab political support in their containment against the Soviet Union. Finally, there was an economic reason: the US did not want to estrange themselves from the Arabs because of their oil.<sup>17</sup> The worry was that if the Soviet Union got control over the Middle Eastern oil pipelines, the most important US allies – Western Europe – would be immobilized.<sup>18</sup> The common denominator was US interests. The reasoning behind the refusal to sell arms to Israel and behind the policy of even-handedness was the same; an overly strong Israel was not consistent with US interests, according to the Eisenhower administration.

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<sup>14</sup> Petersen 2006:33; Summit, April R. 2008:1. *John F. Kennedy and U.S.-Middle East Relations: A History of American Foreign Policy in the 1960s*. Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.

<sup>15</sup> Hahn 2004:1-2, 277-279.

<sup>16</sup> Hahn 2004:261-264, 288-289.

<sup>17</sup> Shlaim 2000:189.

<sup>18</sup> Memorandum of conversation by Russell, 17 April 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2548.

However, after Eisenhower, certain of these premises changed. Israel's position in US policy was subject to a gradual change – from being a bothersome acquaintance, Israel was considered a useful friend. The second issue, containing the Soviet Union, became less important as the Soviet attempts to gain Arab support proved less successful than Washington feared. And finally, on the issue of oil, by the 1960s the United States had established a base of support in a few countries that did not mind their relationship with Israel as much – Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Iraq now accepted Israel as a “historical fact”.<sup>19</sup> This way the US oil supply was less threatened by its alliance with Israel than it had been earlier, and it opened the possibility of moving away from Eisenhower's policy of even-handedness.

During and after Eisenhower's presidency, there was also a gradual shift in US policy from comprehensive peacemaking to a more step-by-step approach to certain selected subjects. In chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, two such examples are shown, analysing the US attempts to tackle the conflict from the development of the Jordan waters and the Palestinian refugee problem. The main reason comprehensive peacemaking was abandoned is that the US government increasingly believed the leaders of the Middle Eastern states were unwilling to compromise and find a settlement in the deadlocked conflict. There was little point for the Americans to commit to finding a solution as long as they were convinced it would fail.<sup>20</sup>

### ***The Ripeness of a Conflict***

The ripeness of a conflict is one of the elements which determine the potential success of the outcome of any negotiation. “[T]he ripeness of conflicts refers to a particular moment in the course of a dispute when circumstances are most conducive to conflict management by an outside actor.”<sup>21</sup> According to this theory, a conflict has a certain point where it is at its most “ripe” for achieving a solution. Crucial elements to such ripeness are that all the involved actors consider a peaceful solution in their best interest, and that they are open to the idea of working towards it.<sup>22</sup>

The ripeness will depend on the military situation between the actors in the conflict, and their perception of it. Proponents of ripeness theory maintain that if there is a mutually hurting stalemate, where neither actor is able to solve the situation with unilateral solutions,

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<sup>19</sup> Hahn 2004:271-272.

<sup>20</sup> Working Paper to Airlie House discussions 12-14 June 1964, *Records relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs: 1951-1976*, box 20.

<sup>21</sup> Kleiboer, Marieke. 1994:110. “Ripeness of a Conflict: A Fruitful Notion?” in *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 31, no. 1, February 1994.

<sup>22</sup> Waage, Hilde Henriksen. 2000:10. “*Norwegians? Who needs Norwegians?*”: *Explaining the Oslo Back Channel: Norway's Political Past in the Middle East*, Oslo: The Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

there is a greater opportunity for a successful third party negotiation. The actors in the conflict also have to believe that bilateral or multilateral solutions are possible and necessary, and they have to be able to take the required steps to achieve such agreement.<sup>23</sup>

Several attempts of finding a decisive definition for ripeness have been made, and for theoretical purposes these are useful. In actual conflict resolution, however, the problem is that the recognition of a “ripe” moment is not all that simple. It may even be recognized only after it has passed.<sup>24</sup> In the Arab-Israeli conflict there are several moments that in retrospect have been considered occasions when peace could have been sought. The period of relative calm between 1956 and 1967 may have been such an occasion, but the most likely outside mediator, the United States, chose not to venture into any efforts for negotiating comprehensive peace in this period.

Lack of ripeness was definitely part of the argumentation for why comprehensive peace initiatives were not pursued by the US after the 1956 war. The Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations all avoided committing to comprehensive peace initiatives, believing that these would not be successful in the political climate in the Middle East. However, using ripeness as a way of making political decisions constitutes a considerable problem: how and when would the conflict become ripe? How would this be determined? Instead, the US administrations in the period explored a series of more or less successful initiatives attempting to create peace with a much smaller scope, such as the efforts to solve the Palestinian refugee problem or water sharing initiatives. The belief that the Arab-Israeli conflict was not ripe for negotiation was part of the reasoning behind the US decision to engage in these piecemeal alternatives instead of exploring the possibility of achieving comprehensive peace between 1956 and 1967.

One danger which it is important to be aware of is that a conclusion regarding the ripeness of a potential mediation might provide convenient “excuses” for not just a failed negotiation, but for avoiding negotiation entirely. The US government claimed that it wanted peace in the Middle East, but it did not actively go about trying to achieve this in the period in question. The lack of ripeness of the conflict may be a reason. But research reveals that other options also affected the decision. For instance, the desire to achieve peace was secondary to other interests, such as stalling Soviet influence in the Middle East; limiting Arab nationalism; and consolidating Israel as a friend and eventually an ally. Thus it is relevant to also consider

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<sup>23</sup> Kleiboer 1994:110-111.

<sup>24</sup> Kleiboer 1994:111. Kleiboer reviews the definitions by Richard N. Haass, Stephen J. Steadman and William Zartman in her paper.

the *willingness* of the US government to negotiate peace. Because the ripeness of a conflict is dependent upon the subjective perceptions of its actors it is ultimately also dependent upon their unconditional willingness to participate in negotiations. Since the US government lacked this willingness, the conflict was never ripe for negotiation.<sup>25</sup>

Since the ripeness is defined partly by the actors' willingness to participate, there is considerable opportunity for affecting if and when ripeness will occur. Ripeness will not necessarily "fall into one's hand".<sup>26</sup> An active mediator can *create* a ripe moment in a conflict. In order to do so, however, the mediator needs leverage.<sup>27</sup> In the Arab-Israeli conflict, the US is commonly considered to have leverage, particularly over Israel. But how much leverage did the US really have? After the 1956 war, one of the few times in US-Israeli history Israel has changed its policy in accordance with US wishes, the US actually went a long way in accommodating Israel, and the policy change came as a result of other countries' pressure as well as that from the United States.<sup>28</sup>

A core concern of the ripeness theory is that if the conditions are not ripe, then mediation might make things worse. The advice to the potential mediator is to step down and not force through diplomatic activity that may lead to a detriment of the conflict rather than improvement. However, the alternative is not to do nothing, but rather to try other means, such as selective military assistance, security guarantees or other commitments. Often, a conflict is rarely ripe in its entirety, though elements of it can be.<sup>29</sup> In a way, it was by this logic that US authorities after 1956 chose to pursue specific parts of the Arab-Israeli conflict rather than to work towards an overall settlement. The question remains, however, if their decision to do so was a result of a lack of willingness to act, or if the circumstances made comprehensive peace unapproachable.

It may be argued that a conflict is not ripe as long as the actors are not convinced that it is. And perhaps in the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict between 1956 and 1967, the fact that the Americans did not think the conflict was ripe was as important to their failure in solving it as an actual lack of ripeness in the conflict.

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<sup>25</sup> Kleiboer 1994:115.

<sup>26</sup> Kleiboer 1994:111, quoting Zartman.

<sup>27</sup> Kleiboer 1994:111-112.

<sup>28</sup> A discussion of the US pressure applied to force Israel to withdraw after the 1956 war can be found in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>29</sup> Haass, Richard N. 1988:246-247. "Ripeness and the settlement of international disputes" in *Survival*, 30:3.

## ***Methods and Source Material***

There has been considerable amounts of research within this field, but often these are either works that describe US policy or Middle Eastern history within a much longer time frame and thus cannot go into specifics in this period;<sup>30</sup> or they singularly aim to cover either the 1956 war or the 1967 war.<sup>31</sup> Although both these approaches are extremely valuable, I believe it will be an important contribution to the research already done to see the 1956-1967 period as a unit, because of the shaping forces that took place.

Professor of History Peter L. Hahn's *Caught in the Middle East* covers US policy towards the conflict in the Middle East between 1945 and 1961.<sup>32</sup> I will draw on his work, but also consider the implications of adding six extra years that will allow me to see the connection between the two previously mentioned wars. For the Kennedy era, one notable contribution is Assistant Professor April Summitt's *John F. Kennedy and U.S.-Middle East Relations*.<sup>33</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency has not been considered as one with much focus on the Middle East, but accounts of the Johnson administration's policy in the region can be found in Professor of International and American Diplomatic History Tore T. Petersen's *The Decline of the Anglo-American Middle East 1961-1969*, and in Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker's *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*.<sup>34</sup>

For the purpose of answering my research questions, I have consulted several primary sources. The first and by far most exhaustive were the US State Department archives. I visited the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) at College Park, Maryland where I examined records relating to US foreign policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the countries and issues related to this, in the period 1956 to 1967. These records consist of memos, telegrams, internal and external correspondence in the US State Department in the

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<sup>30</sup> Spiegel, Stephen L. 1985. *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press; Neff, Donald. 1995. *Fallen Pillars: US Policy towards Palestine and Israel since 1945*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies; Little, Douglas. 2002. *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press; Shlaim, Avi. 2000. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.

<sup>31</sup> Kyle, Keith. 2003. *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris; Louis, WM, Roger and Roger Owen (ed.). 1989. *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Oren, Michael B. 2002. *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>32</sup> Hahn, Peter L. 2004. *Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1945-1961*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press.

<sup>33</sup> Summitt, April R. 2008. *John F. Kennedy and U.S.-Middle East Relations: A History of American Foreign Policy in the 1960s*. Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.

<sup>34</sup> Petersen, Tore T. 2006. *The Decline of the Anglo-American Middle East 1961-1969: A Willing Retreat*. Brighton/Portland: Sussex Academic Press; Cohen, Warren I. and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker (ed.). 1994. *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy 1963-1968*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

period. In addition, I have had great use of the source collection *Foreign Relations of the United States, FRUS*, which is available both in printed and online form. I have also consulted other online sources, for instance UN resolutions, available through the United Nations website.

## **Storm Before the Quiet: US policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict 1945-1956**

The United States was the first country in the world to recognize the State of Israel, on the very same day as the Jewish state was proclaimed on 14 May 1948. The relationship with Israel and Israel's predominantly Arab neighbour states became an important factor around which US authorities were forced to shape their Middle East policy. In addition, there were other international actors who demanded a say in the region, most notably the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and the United Nations.

After the First World War, the areas on both sides of the Jordan River, Palestine and Transjordan, became British mandate areas. The task of managing these areas was not an easy one, especially considering the numerous conflicts the local Arabs had both with each other and with the growing number of Jewish settlers seeking to enforce the dream of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. After 1945, the revelation of the horrors of the Holocaust gave great weight to the Jewish demand for a state of their own. Britain, however, had numerous obligations to the Arabs already living in the Middle East. Transjordan had become an emirate under British protection in 1921, and gained independence in 1946. The question of Palestine remained problematic for decades to come.<sup>35</sup>

President Harry S Truman's administration was divided on the Palestine question. Central officials in the State and Defense Departments as well as in the intelligence community were sceptical towards US support for the establishment of a Jewish state. They worried this would alienate the Arabs which in turn could interfere with US interests in the region. However, influential members of the White House staff were actively working for establishing a Jewish state, and they eventually gained President Truman's support.<sup>36</sup> Following the Harrison report of September 1945, which described the situation of the

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<sup>35</sup> Shlaim 2000:8, 23-24; Yapp, Malcolm E. 1991:140, 145. *The Near East Since the First World War*. London: Longman.

<sup>36</sup> Spiegel 1985: 16-18; Hahn 2004:26-31.

Holocaust survivors in Europe and made recommendations for future US policy, Truman advised the British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, to allow 100 000 Jewish refugees into Palestine, in accordance with the recommendations from Harrison's report.<sup>37</sup> This conflicted with the 1939 White Paper issued by British authorities that had limited Jewish immigration to Palestine to 15 000 a year. The White Paper also granted the Arabs the right to deny further Jewish immigration to the area after a five-year long period of the above mentioned immigration schedule.<sup>38</sup> Ignoring British reluctance to abandon the White Paper policy, Truman chose to go public with the 100 000 recommendation, mainly to serve domestic election purposes. This move angered the British, the Arabs, and Truman's own State Department.<sup>39</sup>

In response to Truman's public announcement, the British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin proposed to the United States that the two Western powers joined together in an "Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry into the Problems of European Jewry and Palestine" (AACOI). After six months the committee concluded that Britain should admit the suggested 100 000 Jewish refugees into Palestine, but it advised against the establishment of both a Jewish and an Arab state. Instead the committee suggested that Palestine should be governed by a UN trusteeship once the British mandate expired.<sup>40</sup>

Although neither of the governments adopted the AACOI report as policy, Truman again chose to publicly support the suggestion of admitting 100 000 refugees, while the British stressed the necessity for considering the report as a whole and not singling out certain issues.<sup>41</sup> Despite this, the cooperation between the United States and the United Kingdom, though somewhat strained, continued throughout the spring and summer of 1946. It culminated in July when the two countries proceeded to promote the Morrison-Grady plan. This plan, developed by negotiating teams from the US and Britain, proposed a British-governed, US-funded Palestine divided into four districts that within certain issues would be self-governed.<sup>42</sup> However, the American government lacked the domestic support for the plan, and the British lost whatever support they might have had because of a Jewish attack on

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<sup>37</sup> Neff 1995:31; "Report of Earl G. Harrison" in *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 13, no. 327, 30 September 1945:456-463; Truman to Attlee, Washington, 31 August 1945, *FRUS 1945*, 8:737-739.

<sup>38</sup> "British White Paper of 1939 on Palestine", available through the Avalon Project.

<sup>39</sup> Neff 1995:31-32; Hahn 2004:33.

<sup>40</sup> Hahn 2004:33-34; Acheson (acting) to Certain American Diplomatic and Consular Officers, 25 April 1946, *FRUS 1946*, 7: 585-586.

<sup>41</sup> Spiegel 1985:22; Harriman to Byrnes, 1 May 1946, *FRUS 1946*, 7: 590; Statement by the President concerning the Report of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, published by State Department on 30 April 1946, printed in *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 14, no. 358, 12 May 1946:783.

<sup>42</sup> Hahn 2004:34-35; Neff 1995:39-40; Harriman to Byrnes, 24 July 1946, *FRUS 1946*, 7: 652-667.

the British military headquarters in Jerusalem. The population of Palestine also opposed the plan. The Palestinians demanded that their majority status be taken into consideration. The Jews, who had complained that the Morrison-Grady plan would make another Jewish “ghetto”, were united in discarding the plan, but divided in their alternatives. While the extremists were taking matters into their own hands, the more moderate leaders of the Zionist movement proposed a two-state solution. Truman, though not completely endorsing the idea of separate Jewish and Arab states in Palestine, made a speech on Yom Kippur on 4 October 1946, which was immediately interpreted as support for partition and the creation of an independent Jewish state.<sup>43</sup>

### ***The Birth of a New State***

The British found themselves unable to establish a political solution in Palestine that was acceptable for both the Arabs and the Jews. Faced with terrorist attacks, rebellions and demands for independence, the British concluded that the strategic advantage of controlling Palestine did not justify the costs.<sup>44</sup> The British government decided to hand the problem over to the United Nations in February 1947, which appointed a committee to deal with Palestine. The majority of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) recommended partition into one Jewish and one Arab state, while Jerusalem would be an international zone.<sup>45</sup>

The US government agencies were as divided as ever. The White House supported partition, while State Department still argued heavily against UNSCOP’s proposal. The main reason was that the State Department officials feared that the US involvement in the Middle East would increase significantly because it did not appear that the other great powers were prepared to implement the provisions decided by UNSCOP. However, Truman remained set on establishing a Jewish state, and he thus discarded the State Department’s worries.<sup>46</sup> When UNSCOP’s recommendation was adopted by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947, the US delegation supported the partition plan for Palestine, and the resolution was passed.<sup>47</sup> The British mandate was scheduled to end on 15 May 1948, and both the US and the rest of

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<sup>43</sup> Neff 1995:41-42.

<sup>44</sup> Hahn 2004:23.

<sup>45</sup> Yapp 1991: 136; Memorandum by Gross to Lovett, 13 May 1948, *FRUS 1948*, 5: 961.

<sup>46</sup> Neff 1995: 45-47; Excerpts From the Minutes of the Sixth Meeting of the United States Delegation to the Second Session of the General Assembly, 15 September 1947, *FRUS 1947*, 5:1150.

<sup>47</sup> UN A/RES/181(II), 29 November 1947.

the world prepared for the likelihood that one or two new states might be proclaimed in the Middle East immediately after this.<sup>48</sup>

Following the resolution in November 1947, there was considerable violence between the Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine. This civil war turned into a regional war when the State of Israel was proclaimed on 14 May, and the Arab states entered the conflict by invading Israel. The war was formally terminated in 1949 with a series of armistice agreements rather than a peace treaty. The borders established in the agreements were radically different than those in the UN partition plan.<sup>49</sup> Israel came out of the war as the clear winner, while the Arab states were forced to retreat. The biggest loss, however, was suffered by the non-Jewish population of the new-born Jewish state, the Palestinians.<sup>50</sup> From 1949 the Palestinians were merely considered as being a refugee problem.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Mediation and Negotiation***

The UN appointed the Swedish Count Folke Bernadotte as UN mediator in Palestine on 20 May 1948 in an attempt to settle the conflict. In September that year, Bernadotte concluded a report proposing a final settlement framework. His proposal, commonly known as the Bernadotte plan, was labelled as a territorial compromise. Palestine would cease to exist, the territory split between Israel and Jordan. Israel would keep the western Galilee, while the Negev would be governed by Arabs. These territorial changes reflected the military realities rather than the original partition plan. The Bernadotte plan also included a Jerusalem governed by an international regime and repatriation of Palestinian refugees in Israel. However, Bernadotte's involvement proved fatal, as he was assassinated by the Jewish terrorist group the Stern Gang on 17 September 1948, the day after his report was presented to the UN.<sup>52</sup>

The US State Department, who had given Bernadotte's report its full support, continued promoting his settlement proposals, hoping to draw on sympathies arising after his death. While the State Department saw the opportunity to work towards a settlement within the Bernadotte framework, the White House was largely preoccupied with the 1948 election

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<sup>48</sup> Gross to Lovett, 13 May 1948, *FRUS 1948*, 5:960-963.

<sup>49</sup> Shlaim 2000:28; Yapp 1991:138; Hahn 2004:52.

<sup>50</sup> In order to avoid confusion, there are several terms that need to be clarified. The term "Jews" is used to refer to the Jewish population of Palestine prior to the establishment of Israel in 1948. The Jewish part of the population of Israel after 1948 is referred to as "Israelis". "Palestinians" will refer to the Arab population of Palestine before 1948, and the Arab population in (and refugees from) the State of Israel after 1948. For a discussion regarding these and other related terms, see Hahn 2004:9.

<sup>51</sup> Yapp 1991:302-303.

<sup>52</sup> Hahn 2004:55.

campaign. In addition to occupying the President's time and attention, the upcoming election also limited his ability to spend time on foreign policy due to an understanding between the two presidential candidates that neither of them would campaign on foreign policy issues because of the Berlin blockade that dominated US foreign affairs. Truman's opponent, Governor Thomas E. Dewey, broke this understanding when he attacked the support the Truman administration had given the Bernadotte plan. As a result Truman thought it appropriate to bring foreign policy back into the campaign, and he thus released a statement reaffirming his support for Israel's right to veto border changes, a part of the Democratic Party platform.<sup>53</sup> The difficulty of maintaining a consistent policy when there was a never-ending tug-of-war between the departments in the US administration was substantial. The State Department attempted to alter the Bernadotte plan's territorial provisions in a way that would be more consistent with Truman's promise to Israel.<sup>54</sup> However, this attempt did not bear fruit. By November, the United States no longer supported the Bernadotte plan.

A further problem was that neither the Arabs nor the Israelis supported the Bernadotte plan. The Arabs disapproved because the plan implied a continued Jewish state, while the Israelis reacted to the portion of the plan that demanded Israel to give up the Negev.<sup>55</sup> As a whole, the Bernadotte plan was as dead by September 1948 as the mediator himself. However, some of the ideas from the plan lived on. One of them materialized in December, when the UN established the Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC) to replace the UN mediator, as had been suggested by Bernadotte. The commission had members from France, Turkey and the United States, and from then on the Truman administration's involvement in the Middle Eastern conflict had to focus on US membership in the PCC.<sup>56</sup>

The aim of the PCC was to make permanent peace out of the armistice agreements that formally had ended the war. In order to achieve that goal, the PCC held a peace conference with representatives from the Arab countries and Israel at Lausanne in Switzerland in 1949. One of the most important issues discussed there was the question of who was responsible for the Palestinian refugees. The difference of opinion was massive. From the Israeli point of view, the Arabs were entirely responsible for the refugees, because they had started the war,

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<sup>53</sup> Spiegel 1985:40-43.

<sup>54</sup> Hahn 2004:59.

<sup>55</sup> Spiegel 1985:40.

<sup>56</sup> Tiller, Stian Johansen. 2009a:26. "Motvillige forhandlingspartnere? Araberstatene og forhandlingene om det palestinske flyktningproblemet i 1949." ("Reluctant Negotiation Partners? The Arab states and the negotiations on the Palestinian refugee problem in 1949" [my translation, from Norwegian]) in *Babylon* 1/2009. Oslo: Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History. For a further account of the US involvement in the PCC, see chapter 5 of this thesis. Chapter 5 will also cover another of Bernadotte's ideas that lived on – the Palestinian refugees' right to return to their homes.

and thus created the problem. The Arab official position, on the other hand, was the complete opposite: The Israelis were responsible for the refugees, because they were to blame for the Palestinian exodus.<sup>57</sup> These irreconcilable positions made negotiations and compromises extremely difficult.

Similarly, the parties held diametrically opposed positions on the territorial issue. Israel, the victor of the war, wanted to base territorial negotiations on the armistice lines. These far exceeded the borders suggested by any of the plans so far proposed, but reflected the status quo that much favoured Israel. The Arabs could not accept the status quo. They wanted the negotiations for permanent borders based on the 1947 UN Partition plan. This was not a very realistic alternative under the circumstances, since Israel due to her success in the war controlled a substantial amount of areas the Arabs wanted redistributed.<sup>58</sup>

Another reason why the Lausanne conference did not produce any significant results was that the parties also disagreed on the form of negotiations. Israel wanted direct, bilateral negotiations with each of the Arab states involved. This was not something the PCC could offer, as the Arab delegations had joined forces and approached the conference with a coordinated policy as the Arab League.<sup>59</sup> Despite these unfortunate circumstances, the PCC kept trying to make peace. The American members of the PCC were putting pressure onto Israel in order to force the Israelis make concessions to the Arab states. Nevertheless, very little was achieved. The Lausanne conference more and more began to look like a failure, a clear indication that the UN had not managed to create a settlement on the many issues it had strived to solve. In short, Lausanne failed to make comprehensive peace.<sup>60</sup>

After Lausanne, the PCC seemed to have lost its momentum. Further undermining the PCC was the Tripartite Declaration of 25 May 1950. The intention of the Tripartite Declaration was to regulate the arms supply in the Middle East. This had become an issue after the abolishment of the arms embargo that regulated the weapon supply during the 1948 war. The declaration affirmed US responsibility for Middle Eastern security as it included a clause that the three governments issuing it, Great Britain, France and the US, would take action to prevent violation of armistice lines or the borders that were the result of the 1948 war.<sup>61</sup> According to President Eisenhower's judgement 15 years later, the Tripartite

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<sup>57</sup> Shlaim 2000:49, 58.

<sup>58</sup> Shlaim 2000:58.

<sup>59</sup> Shlaim 2000:57-58.

<sup>60</sup> Shlaim 2000:62.

<sup>61</sup> Hurewitz, J. C. 1989:27. "The Historical Context" in (ed.) Louis, Wm Roger and Roger Owen. *Suez 1956: The Crisis and Its Consequences*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Declaration was an attempt to “establish peace and preserve the status quo”.<sup>62</sup> Problematic for the PCC, however, was exactly this – preserving the status quo was the opposite of PCC’s task of negotiating a territorial settlement. Since both France and the US were members of the PCC, a dissenting declaration from their own governments undeniably must have been a considerable disappointment.<sup>63</sup>

After the Tripartite Declaration and for the remainder of his presidency, Truman’s attention was rarely focused on the Middle East. The outbreak of hostilities in Korea and the subsequent US invasion in June 1950 dominated the foreign political agenda for the next three years. The troublesome involvement in the Korean War is a considerable part of why the US administration did not commit itself to creating peace in the Middle East until Dwight D. Eisenhower took office in 1953. In the meantime the main headache in the Middle East was caused by several border incidents along the Jordan River.

### ***Water and Territory***

The Jordan River runs from the north of Israel through the Huleh valley, into Lake Tiberias and south to the Dead Sea.<sup>64</sup> It is one of the main fresh water sources for Israel and its neighbours, and it has been one of the central dividing lines between the Middle Eastern countries in the various border arrangements throughout history. The Jordan River was also a dividing line in the conflicts between Arabs and Jews both before and after the establishment of Israel in 1948. The dispute raised the attention of President Truman’s administration in 1949-52.<sup>65</sup>

In the beginning of 1951 Israel started draining marshland north of Lake Huleh in order to lower the water level in the lake, and to straighten the riverbank south of the lake. The expected result of this was to expand the agricultural potential in the area, while an adverse effect was that the irrigation project required flooding of areas owned and inhabited by Palestinians. Furthermore, part of the work took place in one of the demilitarized zones (DMZ) which were established in the armistice agreement between Syria and Israel of 20 July 1949. However, questions regarding sovereignty within the DMZ and rights to use the zone remained somewhat unclear in the text of the agreement. There was an independent

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<sup>62</sup> Eisenhower, Dwight David. 1965:22. *Waging Peace 1956-61: The White House Years*. New York: Doubleday & Company, inc.

<sup>63</sup> Tiller, Stian Johansen, 2009b:97-99. “Defending the UN Agenda: The Peace Effort of the Palestine Conciliation Commission 1949-1951”. Unpublished master’s thesis, University of Oslo.

<sup>64</sup> Lake Tiberias is also known as Lake Kinneret and Sea of Gallilee. As Lake Tiberias is the most common variant used in the documents from the US State Department, this will be the name used in this thesis.

<sup>65</sup> Hahn 2004:171.

commission, the Syrian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission (MAC) responsible for DMZ matters. Consequently, Syria complained to the MAC, which ruled in favour of Syria: Israel did not have sovereign rights to the area. Israel, however, disregarded the ruling, boycotted the MAC meetings and went on with a forced evacuation of several Palestinian villages in the DMZ.<sup>66</sup>

US authorities eventually decided to bring pressure to bear on Israel to withdraw from the DMZ and to respect the MAC ruling. Worried that the tense situation might escalate into another war, the Americans also drafted a UN Security Council resolution against the Israeli actions. Still, the unrest continued throughout the spring of 1951, reaching a climax with an eight day long battle in May. The Security Council passed a ceasefire resolution on 8 May 1951, but while the parties put down their weapons they were blaming each other for igniting the violence.<sup>67</sup> US authorities continued their work in the Security Council. Despite Israeli pressure to avoid this, another resolution was passed on 18 May demanding that Israel stop the construction in the DMZ and that the Palestinians would be allowed to return to their homes.<sup>68</sup>

Such a firm US position against Israel had been quite unique in American Middle East policy since 1948, and it seems slightly uncharacteristic of Truman's administration. Why US authorities chose to stand up to Israeli pressure and promote the resolution remains unclear.<sup>69</sup> However, the importance of this position can be questioned as the Americans quickly re-earned Israel's trust and Arab mistrust by approving further Israeli drainage work under the conditions that Arab-owned land was not affected. Although violence was halted, the dispute regarding the DMZ sovereignty including water rights continued.<sup>70</sup>

In 1953, Israel began the work on another project that was to have serious implications on the relationship with its neighbours. The purpose of this project was to divert water from the Jordan River to the Negev Desert. However, the same problem as with the Huleh-project persisted – much of the work was supposed to take place in the DMZ between Israel and

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<sup>66</sup> Hahn 2004: 93, Shlaim 2000:71.

<sup>67</sup> UN S/2130, res. 92, 8 May 1951; Hahn 2004: 95-96.

<sup>68</sup> UN S/2157, res. 93, 18 May 1951.

<sup>69</sup> According to Peter L. Hahn, there is nothing in the available records that clarifies Truman's position. Hahn 2004:96. However, the Huleh case is summarized as an example of controversies in the Syro-Israeli DMZ in a 1960 document to establish the US position on recurring border conflicts in the DMZ. From this text the intent of the Security Council's processing of the Huleh case appears to be to settle a principle regarding demilitarized zones and the mandate of the MAC. It can thus be argued that it was likely that the US resisted the pressure from Israel in 1951 in order to develop a decisive principle regarding this important question. Herter to several diplomatic posts, 5 April 1960, *CDF 1960-1963*, box 1386.

<sup>70</sup> Hahn 2004: 96-97, 167.

Syria.<sup>71</sup> Further south, Jordan was considering an irrigation project of its own: a dam on the Yarmouk River, on the southern boundary of the Golan Heights. However, the new US administration had other plans. When President Eisenhower took office in 1953, he was determined to solve the dispute. As opposed to Truman, Eisenhower had a close cooperation with the Department of State, headed by John Foster Dulles. Together with Secretary Dulles, Eisenhower saw the water controversy as both a problem and an opportunity to solve some of the major questions in the overall Arab-Israeli conflict. The Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs (NEA) had through American engineers come up with an alternative plan that would ensure water supply for both Israel and Jordan, and thus make the unilateral projects superfluous. The NEA project would also enable resettlement of some 400 000 Palestinian refugees in Jordan. The problem with the plan, however, was that it required concessions from both Israel and Jordan. Israel refused to let Jordan access Lake Tiberias, while Jordan refused to publicly negotiate with Israel at all, as was the official policy of the Arab states at the time.<sup>72</sup>

In the absence of any agreement, Israel started digging a canal at Banat Yaacov in the DMZ on 2 September 1953. As could be expected, Syria protested. Again, the Syrians claimed that Israel's work was in conflict with the 1949 armistice lines, that it violated the rights of the Palestinian landowners, and the Syrians were especially worried that it gained Israel a military advantage.<sup>73</sup> US authorities had been about to allocate economic aid to Israel when they learned about the unilateral Israeli irrigation project. The Eisenhower administration decided not to release the funds to Israel until the Banat Yaacov matter was resolved.<sup>74</sup> Chief of staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), Vagn Bennike, who also was chairman of the MAC, sent a letter to the Israeli government on 23 September, requesting that Israel gave up the work in the DMZ. Israel did not bow to this. On the contrary, the irrigation work was speeded up. US officials continued withholding funds, as a reaction to the Jewish state's refusal to comply with Bennike's decision.<sup>75</sup> The Banat Yaacov controversy was also brought before the Security Council, but this time the Council failed to pass a resolution.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Shlaim 2000:88-89.

<sup>72</sup> Hahn 2004:171-172.

<sup>73</sup> Lourie (acting) to Embassy in Syria, 16 September 1953, *FRUS 1952-1954*, 9:1315.

<sup>74</sup> Dulles to Tel Aviv, 8 September 1953, *FRUS 1952-1954*, 9:1303; Memorandum by the Smith (acting) to the President, 21 October 1953, *FRUS 1952-1954*, 9:1372.

<sup>75</sup> Hahn 2004:172, Shlaim 2000:89.

<sup>76</sup> Herter to several diplomatic posts, 5 April 1960, *CDF 1960-1963*, box 1386.

Further increasing the conflict level was one of the most serious border incidents yet. On the night of 14 October 1953, Israeli soldiers partly belonging to the newly formed Unit 101 attacked the Arab village Qibya in the West Bank, which at the time was Jordanian territory, killing and wounding a large number of civilians, demolishing homes and firing at two nearby villages also on Jordanian territory in order to avoid the arrival of Jordanian soldiers.<sup>77</sup> The attack was a retaliation for the murder of an Israeli woman and two children performed by alleged Jordanian infiltrators that had crossed the Israeli border on the previous night. However, the retaliation was not proportionate to the original aggression.<sup>78</sup> The Qibya incident followed other recent Israeli actions that their neighbours perceived as threats – in addition to the diversion attempts of the Jordan River and work in the DMZ, Israel had recently moved their Foreign Ministry to Jerusalem.<sup>79</sup>

Israel was internationally condemned after the Qibya incident. The UN Security Council held a session of meetings on the incident starting 19 October. In Resolution 101 of 24 November, the retaliatory action at Qibya was declared a violation of the 1948 ceasefire and the 1949 General Armistice Agreement. In addition, the Security Council expressed “*the strongest censure*” [their italics] of the incident, and it called upon Israel to prevent such actions in the future.<sup>80</sup> The US government was also infuriated. The US decision to withhold funds to Israel as a result of the Banat Yaacov controversy was thus publicly announced in a press conference on 20 October 1953.<sup>81</sup> Despite the outcry against Israel after the Qibya incident, however, the domestic reaction to the US sanctions against Israel was very negative. Consequently, Dulles and Eisenhower decided to change the tactic with regards to the US involvement in the water sharing problems in the Middle East.<sup>82</sup>

The Security Council resolved that Israel should stop the work on the canal in a resolution on 27 October 1953.<sup>83</sup> The Israeli government spokesperson in the UN agreed that the work should be suspended until the Security Council had examined the issue further, and the work in the DMZ was terminated on midnight, 28 October. As a response, Dulles declared

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<sup>77</sup> Unit 101 consisted of specially trained elite soldiers, led by Major Ariel Sharon (who later would become Prime Minister in Israel). The specialty of Unit 101 was reprisal operations to deal with infiltration. Morris, Benny. 1997:251-260. *Israel's Border Wars: 1949-1956*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>78</sup> Hahn 2004:161; Shlaim 2000:90-91; Seelye to Department of State, 15 October 1953, *FRUS 1952-1954*, 9:1358.

<sup>79</sup> Seelye to Department of State. 15 October 1953:1359.

<sup>80</sup> UN S/3139/Rev.2, res. 101, 24 November 1953.

<sup>81</sup> “Secretary Dulles’ Statement on Aid to Israel”, Department of State Press Release, 23 October 1953. The text is printed in *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 29, no. 749, 2 November 1953:589-590.

<sup>82</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, Yaacov. 1988:434-435. “The Limits of Economic Sanctions: The American-Israeli Case of 1953” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 23, no. 3.

<sup>83</sup> UN S/3128, res. 100, 27 October 1953.

that the aid now would be released, which in turn angered the Arabs.<sup>84</sup> The conflict over how to best use the scarce water resources was not yet over.

### ***The Johnston Plan***

On 7 October 1953, Eisenhower appointed Eric Johnston as his personal representative and ambassador to the Middle East.<sup>85</sup> Johnston's overall task was to help create peace in the region, while one of the specific goals was the promotion of a project called the Jordan Valley Plan (JVP), popularly known as the Johnston plan.<sup>86</sup> A unified plan for usage of the Jordan River was not a new idea – already in January 1945 there were suggestions for a Jordan Valley Authority modelled on the successful Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had commissioned a unified plan for the Jordan River. The idea was revisited after Dulles' tour in the Middle East in June 1953, after which he spoke warmly of irrigation projects to solve refugee problems in the area.<sup>88</sup> The plan Johnston promoted from the autumn of 1953 until the spring of 1955 was specifically aimed at maximizing the water resources for all the Middle Eastern states, and for using this in the benefit of refugee relief projects.<sup>89</sup> The goal was thus to include several elements in one settlement, although the Johnston plan did not aspire to be a comprehensive peace initiative.

Johnston faced substantial obstacles. His assignment got off to a bad start with the Banat Yaacov controversy and the Qibya raid. The climate for cooperation and peace-making was hardly ideal when Johnston landed in Beirut on 22 October 1953. In addition to this, several of the Arab states took offence to the fact that Johnston was a member of the pro-Zionist American Christian Palestine Committee.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, through a series of visits to the region Johnston managed to shift some ground in the deadlocked conflict. The general thought was that the Johnston plan would constitute a practical rather than a political solution to several of the problems in the Middle East, which Johnston quickly concluded there was no

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<sup>84</sup> "Economic Aid to Israel", Statement by Secretary Dulles, Department of State Press Release, 28 October 1953. The text is printed in *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 29, no. 751, 16 November 1953:674-675.

<sup>85</sup> The letter Eisenhower sent to Johnston appointing him is printed in footnote 1 of Dulles' letter to Johnston on 13 October 1953, *FRUS 1952-1954*, 9:1348.

<sup>86</sup> There are multiple names for this plan – in addition to the Johnston plan and the more formal Jordan Valley Plan (JVP), it has also been referred to as "the Unified plan" or simply "the Johnston mission". In this account it will be referred to as the Johnston plan because it is under this name it is most commonly known.

<sup>87</sup> Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, 4 January 1945, *FRUS 1945*, 8: 678.

<sup>88</sup> "Report on the Near East", Dulles' Radio Address, printed in *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 28, no. 729, 15 June 1953:831-835.

<sup>89</sup> Hahn 2004: 172-173.

<sup>90</sup> Hahn 2004:173; Hare to State, 22 October 1953, *FRUS 1952-1954*, 9:1380.

foundation for at the time.<sup>91</sup> This strategy seemed efficient, as Johnston during his first visit to the region had already managed to convince both Arab and Israeli leaders to accept one of the keys to further progress: the principle of unified development of the Jordan River valley. Building on this, Johnston's following visits earned reassurances that the Middle Eastern states would agree on storing water in Lake Tiberias, and eventually Johnston managed to land a tentative agreement supported by Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt, which was to be further negotiated with Israel.<sup>92</sup>

However, the Israelis had already begun to change their mind regarding the shared usage of Lake Tiberias, and after three days of negotiations, Johnston only managed to get the Israeli government to agree to terms so unfavourable that he believed the Arabs would not accept them.<sup>93</sup> This hypothesis was never tested as the Arab states withdrew their support to the Johnston plan, largely as a reaction to Israel's Gaza raid on 28 February 1955.<sup>94</sup> Thus, the Johnston plan was rejected. It had been presented in several versions to the Middle Eastern states, but Johnston did not manage to find an alternative that was acceptable for both sides. According to Eisenhower, Johnston's mission failed to create a long-lasting difference because of "prejudice and resentments on both sides" in the conflict.<sup>95</sup> Even though the Johnston plan repeatedly ran into obstacles, Eric Johnston himself did not lose faith that a settlement could be reached.<sup>96</sup> However, the American leaders had given up on the Johnston plan, and gradually let it fade away. Instead they promoted the initially top secret Alpha plan.<sup>97</sup> By the time of yet another Israeli attempt to unilaterally divert water from the Jordan River in 1956 – although this time under limitations imposed by the Johnston plan – any hopes of getting the parties to formally commit to the plan were long gone.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Johnston to the President, 17 November 1953, *FRUS 1952-54*, 9:1418.

<sup>92</sup> Hahn 2004:172-173; Johnston to the Department of State, 20 February 1955, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 14:65.

<sup>93</sup> Johnston to the Department of State, 24 February 1955, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 14:68.

<sup>94</sup> Hahn 2004:174.

<sup>95</sup> Eisenhower 1965:23.

<sup>96</sup> Johnston to the Department of State, 24 February 1955:68. Johnston also wanted to revive his mission after it was halted, and he unsuccessfully tried to find support for this in the State Department between 1957 and 1959. Hahn 2004:253. For a further account of these efforts and the continuation of the Johnston plan, see Chapter 4 of this thesis.

<sup>97</sup> The Alpha plan and the Johnston plan were not necessarily incompatible, and Alpha was not originally intended to replace the Johnston plan. On the contrary, the Alpha plan included a provision that the parties would accept the Johnston plan, see Hahn 2004:183. There was an expressed intention from the initiators of Alpha to allow Johnston's mission to continue in order to give "the Arabs and the Israelis an opportunity to accept international cooperation or to refuse it." See Mallory to the Department of State, 23 December 1954, *FRUS 1952-1954*, 9:1734-35.

<sup>98</sup> Hahn: 2004:174. According to Avi Shlaim the riparian countries behaved in accordance with the proposals in the Johnston plan over the next decade even though nothing was signed. Shlaim 2000:110.

## ***The Alpha Plan***

Eisenhower and Dulles, together with Foreign Minister and later Prime Minister of Britain, Anthony Eden, were the architects behind a peace plan code-named Alpha. The Alpha plan was initiated in 1955, after secret talks between British and US officials late in 1954. The terms of the Alpha plan included mutual settlement of refugees in both Israel and the Arab states; a termination of the Suez Canal blockade, which had been ongoing since the first Arab-Israeli war; and certain territorial changes, among them the dividing of the DMZ.<sup>99</sup>

The US government had good reasons to promote the Alpha plan at this particular time. First of all, tension in the region was escalating. Britain was facing opposition both in Egypt and in Iran, the first as a result of a controversy over the Suez Canal, while the second was a matter of oil. Closely connected was that US influence in the Middle East was increasing, while Britain's was decreasing, and with a stronger involvement came a stronger need for the Americans for creating stability. Finally, the Eisenhower administration was acutely aware that there were domestic reasons why time was not on their side – with a US presidential election coming up in 1956, a controversial issue such as the conflict in the Middle East preferably should be solved in due time to avoid electoral considerations interfering with US involvement in the settlement.<sup>100</sup>

The Alpha plan was intended to “involve the solution of the principal issues between Israel and her Arab neighbors,” but it was considered too long a shot to immediately aim for “formal and comprehensive peace treaties”. The hope, though, was that the settlement proposed in the Alpha plan eventually would lead to formal peace.<sup>101</sup> This hope never materialized, largely because the Middle Eastern states refused to accept the conditions of the Alpha plan.

Nasser, who at first seemed interested in the Alpha plan, changed his mind due to two events: the signing of the Baghdad Pact and the Gaza raid. An agreement which initially was a military cooperation between Turkey and Pakistan had been encouraged by the US because the Eisenhower administration believed in the need for a NATO-like organization in the Middle East.<sup>102</sup> The Baghdad Pact was the closest manifestation of this vision. The US was not a member of the alliance itself since it did not wish to confront the Soviet Union, be indebted to Israel or to anger Egypt, and resisted membership even after Iraq, Iran and Britain

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<sup>99</sup> Hahn 2004:182-186.

<sup>100</sup> “Possibility of Settlement of Principal Israel-Arab Issues”, attached to Murphy to Hoover, 23 May 1955, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 14:199-205.

<sup>101</sup> Murphy to Hoover, 23 May 1955:201.

<sup>102</sup> Spiegel 1985:62.

joined the Baghdad Pact. However, US authorities kept close ties to the alliance and cooperated with it. Nasser's main objection to the Baghdad Pact was that it undermined Arab independence, as he believed it was dictated from the West. The announcement of the Baghdad Pact on 24 February 1955 merely days after Dulles had informed Nasser of Alpha, did nothing to improve Nasser's will to cooperate within the Alpha framework.<sup>103</sup>

What eventually caused Nasser to reject Alpha, however, was the Israeli attack on the Egyptian army headquarters in Gaza on 28 February. Thirty-seven Egyptian soldiers were killed, and another thirty-one were wounded. As with the Qibya raid two years earlier, the raid in Gaza was commanded by Ariel Sharon. The raid was supposed to be a retaliation for two minor infiltration incidents the Israelis believed were directly tied to Egyptian military intelligence. However, the attack and the extent of it was surprising, as the Israeli-Egyptian border had just enjoyed four months of quiet. The attack on Gaza was the most serious incident between Israel and Egypt since the armistice agreements of 1949.<sup>104</sup>

It is tempting to do as officials in the US State Department did: speculate whether the Gaza raid was a deliberate action by the Israelis to undermine Alpha. The Israelis had been negative towards this initiative from the moment they learned about it.<sup>105</sup> Whether or not this was the case, the raid became a turning point for the worse in Egypt-Israeli relations. According to Nasser's version, the Gaza raid forced him to reprioritize and focus on defence which eventually led to the purchase of Soviet weapons in the Czech-Egyptian arms deal of September 1955. As seen from Israel, however, Nasser only used the Gaza raid as an excuse for a turn of policy he would have made anyway.<sup>106</sup>

Either way, the increased tension between Egypt and Israel, and the fact that Egypt seemed to have picked the "wrong" side in the Cold War, made it impossible for the US to keep Alpha going much longer. Dulles made a final attempt during the autumn of 1955 by publishing the until-then secret plan, but there remained little hope for a solution. The final blow was struck at the end of 1955, when the Middle Eastern states offered unyielding and incompatible demands for further negotiations.<sup>107</sup>

### ***The Gamma Plan***

One final US attempt to solve the conflict between Israel and the Arab states before it escalated into another war was the Gamma plan, which was aimed at Israel and Egypt

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<sup>103</sup> Hahn 2004:152-153; Spiegel 1985:62-63.

<sup>104</sup> Shlaim 2000:124.

<sup>105</sup> Hahn 2004:184-185.

<sup>106</sup> Shlaim 2000:126-128.

<sup>107</sup> Hahn 2004:185-186

specifically.<sup>108</sup> President Eisenhower tried to repeat the relative success of sending a trusted mediator who in person would try to shift some ground in the worsening conflict. The Gamma plan was a covert mission, stretching from January to March 1956. In addition to making it possible for both Israel and Egypt to negotiate without losing face, the secrecy was intended to make it possible for a US-issued mediator to try to convince Egypt of leaving the path of communist sympathies the US administration feared Egypt had entered.<sup>109</sup> Former Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Anderson went to meet Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser with the intention of negotiating and hopefully settling a bilateral peace treaty.<sup>110</sup>

Eisenhower had high personal regard for Robert “Bob” Anderson. He wrote in his diary on 11 January 1956 that Anderson was “one of the most capable men [he knew].”<sup>111</sup> Dispatching Anderson might have been a last resort, but Eisenhower hoped that he would succeed in his difficult task, and that this would bring both Egypt and Israel closer to the US. If the conflict between the two was resolved, Eisenhower believed the United States would be able to supply both countries with “almost any kind of material aid”. The grim scenario, however, was that Israel and Egypt could end up standing on opposite sides in the Cold War, with the Soviet Union funding Egypt, and the US funding Israel. This was an alternative Eisenhower wanted to avoid at all costs, and he was willing “to do anything within reason to bring [Israel and Egypt] closer together”.<sup>112</sup>

The problem was that the main reason both Nasser and Ben-Gurion agreed to receive Anderson was primarily that both countries needed American goodwill, and not because they were particularly interested in making peace. Egypt was planning a large construction project at the Aswan High Dam, and the project was relying on American funding. Ben-Gurion wanted to purchase American weapons in order to match the Czech-Egyptian arms deal.<sup>113</sup> Neither Nasser nor Ben-Gurion seemed to believe in or even to seek peace at that time. Once again their positions were so far apart that the task for a mediator of bringing about some kind of compromise seemed virtually impossible. In the end the Gamma plan failed like its predecessors, mainly due to the Middle Eastern states’ refusal to make concessions.<sup>114</sup> Although the experience from both Alpha and Gamma made the Eisenhower administration

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<sup>108</sup> Shlaim 2000:155.

<sup>109</sup> Spiegel 1985:67.

<sup>110</sup> Hahn 2004: 190.

<sup>111</sup> Diary Entry by the President, 11 January 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 15:23.

<sup>112</sup> Diary Entry by the President, 11 January 1956:23.

<sup>113</sup> Shamir, Shimon. 1989:80. “The Collapse of Project Alpha” in (ed.) Louis, Wm Roger and Roger Owen. *Suez 1956: The Crisis and Its Consequences*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Shlaim 2000:156.

<sup>114</sup> Shamir 1989:80-81, 100; Shlaim 2000:156-157.

sceptical to the possibility of achieving lasting peace in the Middle East, this still was an important goal for them. Stability in the Middle East was seen as the best insurance against Soviet infiltration, and the recent Egyptian arms deal had further convinced Dulles and Eisenhower that this was a more imminent danger than ever. Thus, the Americans continued promoting proposals for Arab-Israeli peacemaking, this time through the United Nations.

### ***The Hammarskjöld Mission***

Early in 1956, Dulles proposed that a United Nations-dispatched mediator would arrange peace talks with the question of Palestinian refugees and borders as its primary issues. The Security Council passed a resolution accepting this proposition on 5 April 1956. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld was appointed to the difficult task. Before Hammarskjöld could commence his work, however, further violence between Israel and Egypt strangled the mission before it had started. Instead of negotiating a permanent settlement, Hammarskjöld's mission became a desperate attempt to avoid war.<sup>115</sup>

Hammarskjöld managed to avoid war in April, despite the fact that both sides had violated the armistice agreements. In light of the recent confrontations there was no hope for a comprehensive peace plan. Hammarskjöld's mission ended in June, when the Security Council passed a new resolution, urging the parties to observe the ceasefire, respect armistices, and "demonstrating their wish for peaceful conditions".<sup>116</sup> In the end, Hammarskjöld's mission was only one out of many futile efforts to end the stalemate that had prevented peace in the Middle East. Instead the tension in the region was rising again, with the build-up to crisis in mid-1956.

### ***A New War in the Middle East***

Throughout the period 1945-1956, US authorities chose several paths to try to handle the unruly Middle East. The establishment of a new state in the region; the border conflicts and wars that arose as a result of this; and the difficulty of maintaining friendly or at least cordial relations with both the Arab states and Israel without estranging them or the population at home proved a challenge for both Presidents Truman and Eisenhower. Unfortunately this was a challenge that could not always be met, and frequently the US efforts to treat the parties equally only resulted in severed relations with both the Arabs and the Israelis. Establishing the US as a great power in the Middle East while containing the Soviet Union was to become gradually more important during the next decade.

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<sup>115</sup> Hahn 2004:190-191; Shlaim 2000:158.

<sup>116</sup> Hahn 2004:191-192, quote from UN S/3605, res. 114, 4 June 1956.

Attempts at creating peace and stability in the Middle East after World War Two showed that the Arab-Israeli conflict was more complex than any of the erstwhile initiatives had accounted for. The issues in the conflict were – and still are – so deeply entwined that it is almost impossible to separate them from each other, and, consequently, equally impossible to create peace or stability without taking this into consideration. Why, then, did the US continue with its piecemeal approach, not even trying to solve, but only to manage conflict issues such as refugees and water? Why did the US authorities not try to promote a comprehensive peace in the Middle East after the next big showdown, the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956, which escalated into another full-scale war?

## **Stepping Up: October 1956-March 1957**

The hostilities of the war that started on 29 October 1956 ended with a ceasefire ten days later.<sup>117</sup> President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles worked intensely during and in the aftermath of the hostilities, first to achieve a diplomatically acceptable ceasefire and then to make the aggressors pull out from the Egyptian areas. With the successful US part in terminating the 1956 war, it appeared that the US was about to enter into a new role in the Middle East. But were they ready? What would this role be, and why did they decide to take on this responsibility in a region the United States previously had largely left to its European allies?

### ***Diplomacy in a State of Shock***

Suez had been a point of worry ever since Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser declared the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company on 26 July 1956. Prior to this, the American relationship with Egypt had become very strained. The Egyptian recognition of the People's Republic of China, and the subsequent withdrawal of the American offer to fund the Egyptian Aswan Dam project were among the incidents that had led to a very cold tone between the two countries. However, through a number of diplomatic efforts, most importantly the London Conference on 16 August, some of the immediate warmongering had seemingly cooled down. Even Britain and France, which had been among the loudest dissident voices to Nasser's declaration because the majority of shareholders in the Canal Company were British and French, appeared inclined to accept a diplomatic solution rather than a military one.<sup>118</sup>

In addition, there were other issues that seemed more likely to spark violence both in the Middle East and elsewhere. On the Israeli-Jordanian border there were several clashes between Jordanian infiltrators and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). The instability of the

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<sup>117</sup> Hahn 2004: 206.

<sup>118</sup> Neff 1981:253-254; Waage, Hilde Henriksen. 1996:235-238. *Norge – Israels beste venn: Norsk Midtøsten-politikk 1949-1956* [Norway – Israel's Best Friend: Norwegian Middle East Policy 1949-1956, in Norwegian]. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

domestic political situation in Jordan was also a cause of concern, especially when the Americans received (false) reports that King Hussein had been assassinated. If hostilities were to break out between Israel and its neighbours, it seemed more likely to be on the Jordanian front than the Egyptian one.<sup>119</sup>

The Middle East was only one of the areas demanding the Eisenhower administration's attention. On 19 October mass demonstrations broke out against the Soviet Union in Poland. On 23 October Hungary was engulfed in rebellion, following the inauguration of the new Prime Minister, Imre Nagy. The Hungarian people were eager to adopt a model similar to the Polish one, where the local government enjoyed greater independence from Moscow than most of the Soviet Bloc countries. The world held its breath awaiting the Soviet reaction to the Hungarian democratic aspirations.<sup>120</sup> In Washington, D.C., there was hope that the developments in Poland and Hungary in a long-term perspective might lead to weaker ties between these countries and the Soviet Union, perhaps a sign that the Soviet Bloc was crumbling.<sup>121</sup> In a short-term perspective, however, the US authorities were aware that there was a risk for a Soviet invasion to regain control of Hungary. Such an invasion had the potential for expanding into a larger war. Thus, both Eisenhower and Dulles were extremely careful not to say anything or act in any way that could be perceived as a challenge by the Soviet Union.<sup>122</sup>

Additionally, the US presidential election was approaching. Seeking a second term in the White House, Eisenhower could hardly ignore the domestic popular opinion when deciding how to respond to the problems on the international stage. According to Dulles it was not entirely unlikely that Israel would attempt to take advantage of the US election when timing a potential attack on Jordan. Eisenhower was therefore determined not to let electoral concerns dictate his foreign policy.<sup>123</sup>

Thus the attack on Egypt came as a bolt from the blue to the Eisenhower government. When the first reports of the Israeli attack arrived in Washington, the immediate US reaction was to turn to their European partners in the Middle East – Britain and France. One of the pressing questions when the threat of war over Suez could no longer be ignored was whether the Tripartite Declaration could or should be revived. The Declaration, originally issued by

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<sup>119</sup> Hahn 2004:198-200; Kyle 2003:263-266.

<sup>120</sup> Campbell, John C. 1989:234-236. "The Soviet Union, the United States, and the Twin Crises of Hungary and Suez" in (ed.) Louis, Wm Roger and Roger Owen. *Suez 1956: The Crisis and Its Consequences*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>121</sup> Memorandum from Edman to Zorthian, 24 October 1956. *FRUS 1955-1957*, 25:270-271.

<sup>122</sup> Campbell 1989:237.

<sup>123</sup> Hahn 2004:199-200, 204.

Britain, France and the United States as a means of regulating arms supply in the Middle East, had become a frequent point of reference in American foreign policy towards the region since 1950. However, it did not appear that the parties were particularly committed to the Declaration. France especially, which had been a major arms supplier for Syria even prior to the signing of the declaration, could not be said to be very dedicated to this responsibility. France had begun export of arms to Israel in 1950. The US and Britain were aware of and objected to this, but the arms shipments continued with a brief pause in 1955-1956.<sup>124</sup> In 1956, the Eisenhower administration even convinced the French and Canadian governments to sell military jets to Israel, as a means of taking some of the pressure off of Israeli arms demands to the US.<sup>125</sup>

Despite its obvious limitations in terms of actually reducing arms in the Middle East, the Tripartite Declaration had remained important in demonstrating the unity of the three partners. However, Anglo-American staff talks concerning the future of the Tripartite cooperation in the first half of 1956 had not led anywhere, and when addressing the question of the declaration's applicability to the situation in Suez, the Americans found that the British and French described the Tripartite Declaration as "inoperable".<sup>126</sup>

Little did the Eisenhower administration know that their European allies already were deeply involved in the acts of war. The British and French had secretly undergone negotiations with Israel, and in an agreement signed by Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau and British Foreign Office Undersecretary Patrick Dean, an attack against Egypt to oust Nasser was planned. The Americans knew nothing of the plot.<sup>127</sup>

Speculations were flying at a conference Eisenhower had with the Secretary and several of their advisors on 30 October. At this point it was fairly clear that both the French and the British were more deeply involved than they pretended to be. The President suggested that the British might plan on settling the issue over Suez quickly to ensure an uninterrupted oil supply. Undersecretary Herbert Hoover Jr. implied that the Europeans were seeking to force the Americans to choose sides – either their allies or the Arabs. Secretary Dulles

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<sup>124</sup> Levey, Zach 2008:89-90. "French-Israeli Relations, 1950-1956: The Strategic Dimension" in (ed.) Simon C. Smith, *Reassessing Suez 1956: New Perspectives on the Crisis and its Aftermath*, Aldershot: Ashgate. It is worth noting that while the Tripartite Declaration intended to hinder the development of an arms race between the Arab States and Israel, it also recognized the states' need for a certain level of arms. A certain amount of arms sales to the Middle East was therefore not in principle in conflict with the Declaration, and it should be mentioned that both Britain and the US also were exporters of arms to the region.

<sup>125</sup> Hahn 2004:189-190.

<sup>126</sup> Kyle 2003:103-105, 353-354.

<sup>127</sup> Hahn 2004:201.

wondered whether the British and the French counted too much upon their US friends, knowing that they would not let them “go under economically”.<sup>128</sup> Later that same day, Dulles voiced a suspicion that the British and the French were in on Israel’s attack.<sup>129</sup>

Even though suspicions were raised, the American government still did not know the full extent of Britain and France’s involvement. In an attempt to clarify the situation, President Eisenhower sent a personal letter to Eden, demanding to be enlightened. Eisenhower also enquired on the British stand on a possible continuation of the Tripartite cooperation.<sup>130</sup> Before there was any reason to expect a reply, however, the picture became clearer by new reports from the Middle East. On 30 October 1956 Britain and France issued an ultimatum to Israel and Egypt, demanding that both sides stop all acts of war and withdraw from the Canal Zone. In addition, Egypt was expected to accept a temporary Anglo-French occupation.<sup>131</sup> Since Israel was in on the staged ultimatum, they complied. The Egyptians on the other hand raged that they, as the attacked party, were asked to withdraw, especially considering it was their own territory they were supposed to withdraw from. Israeli forces, on the other hand, would remain on Egyptian territory. Thus Egypt refused to act in accordance with the ultimatum, as expected by the three conspirators. As a result, Britain and France used this as an excuse to intervene. By 31 October the image of an Anglo-French-Israeli conspiracy was forming in the minds of the members of the US National Security Council (NSC). The extent of France’s military equipment export to Israel was larger than the Americans had imagined, and there were intelligence reports about a rapid increase in the French-Israeli communication prior to the outbreak of hostilities. There were also indications that the British involvement was significant.<sup>132</sup>

Eisenhower was outraged. He did not think that the British and the French had an “adequate cause for war.”<sup>133</sup> In a radio and television address on 31 October, the President declared that he believed his European allies were wrong in issuing an ultimatum to Egypt and Israel, and he condemned the Israeli attack. These actions were, in Eisenhower’s opinion, irreconcilable with the principles of the United Nations. He also said that the United States would not participate in any military actions in Suez, “[f]or we do not accept the use of force

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<sup>128</sup> Bowie, Robert R. 1989:208-209. “Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Suez Crisis” in (ed.) Louis, Wm Roger and Roger Owen. *Suez 1956: The Crisis and Its Consequences*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Memorandum of a conference with the President by Goodpaster, 30 October 1956, *FRUS 1955-57*, 16:851-855.

<sup>129</sup> Memorandum of conversation by Elbrick, 30 October 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957* 16:876.

<sup>130</sup> Eisenhower to Eden, 30 October 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 16:848-850.

<sup>131</sup> Kyle 2003:358-359.

<sup>132</sup> Shlaim 2000:179; Kyle 2003:358-359, 365; Bowie 1985:209; Memorandum of a discussion at the NSC by Gleason, 1 November 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 16:903-904.

<sup>133</sup> Memorandum of a conference with the President, 30 October 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 16:853.

as a wise or proper instrument for the settlement of international disputes.”<sup>134</sup> Eisenhower also communicated this view directly to his European colleagues. In a message to Eden and the French Prime Minister Guy Mollet, the President expressed his concern about the European actions in the conflict. Eisenhower urged the prime ministers to reconsider what he called “drastic action”, especially at a time when the matter was about to be considered by the Security Council.<sup>135</sup>

The upcoming discussions in the United Nations were of concern to the Americans. The main worry seemed to be that if the Americans failed to act, the Soviet Union might be able to make a move and effectively take charge in the UN. Dulles considered this particularly risky in the present situation where a number of previously colonized states were emerging, seeking friendship and alliances on the international stage. If the US sided with the British and French against Egypt, Dulles feared that this would irrevocably link the United States with the colonial policies of Britain and France. Thus the newly independent states would unavoidably gravitate towards the Soviet Union. This was unacceptable.<sup>136</sup>

It is nothing less than tragic that we at this very time, when we are on the point of winning an immense and long-hoped-for victory over Soviet colonialism in Eastern Europe, we should be forced to choose between following in the footsteps of Anglo-French colonialism in Asia and Africa, or splitting our course away from their course.<sup>137</sup>

Dulles later claimed that choosing not to side with their allies was the hardest decision he and President Eisenhower ever had to make.<sup>138</sup> However, the conclusion was clear, even if it was painstakingly reached: the Americans had to oppose the British and French, to take a firm stand in the Suez Canal Conflict, and it had to be done in a way that would not estrange any other allies. The US also wanted to send a message to the Soviet Union making it absolutely clear who was in charge. Thus, the scene had to be the United Nations. However, the Americans faced several difficulties in the UN. The first US attempt to bring the issue up in front of the Security Council was vetoed by Britain and France. This was the first time Britain had ever used their veto power.<sup>139</sup> Two following attempts for ceasefire resolutions, both

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<sup>134</sup> Eisenhower speech, 31 October 1956, published in *Department of State Bulletin*, 12 November 1956, vol. 35, no. 907:744-745.

<sup>135</sup> Eisenhower to Eden and Mollet, 30 October 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 16:866.

<sup>136</sup> Memorandum by Gleason, 1 November 1956:906.

<sup>137</sup> Dulles in Memorandum by Gleason, 1 November 1956:907.

<sup>138</sup> Dulles speech to the National Press Club on 16 January 1958, printed in *Department of State Bulletin*, 3 February 1958, vol. 38, no. 971:166.

<sup>139</sup> Kyle 2003:364.

proposed by the Soviet Union, were also vetoed.<sup>140</sup> Not willing to give up, however, the superpowers were forced to turn to alternative options.

### ***Acting Like a Superpower***

Eisenhower was determined to find a solution in the United Nations system, and he was equally determined to beat the Soviet Union to it.<sup>141</sup> It was preferable to the US government to work through the UN rather than outside it “since that body [the UN] is so intimately linked with the Palestine problem”.<sup>142</sup> This also reflects the Eisenhower administration’s tendency to use the UN as a tool to promote US interests. While the Eisenhower administration publicly claimed that the United Nations was a cornerstone of American policy, in reality the UN seemed more like a stepping stone during the Eisenhower era.<sup>143</sup> During and after the 1956 war in the Middle East, the UN was definitely considered by the Americans as a means for American policy. The United Nations became the multilateral alibi the Americans needed to achieve credibility in the post-colonial world. At the same time, the UN was dependant on the US for support and leadership.<sup>144</sup>

In November 1956, however, the UN was not the easiest arena since Britain and France were blocking the Security Council with their vetoes. Instead, the Americans were forced to turn to a Yugoslavian proposal of employing a not-yet used resolution stemming from the Korean War. “Uniting for Peace” had been passed while the Soviet Union was boycotting the Security Council due to the United Nations’ refusal to recognize the People’s Republic of China. Assuming that the Soviet Union might return to the Security Council, the other members of the Council took the opportunity to install a security net to avoid a potential Soviet veto, which would have rendered the Council ineffective. The “Uniting for Peace”-resolution gave the opportunity for the General Assembly in a scheduled or emergency assembly to take over a Security Council case where the Council was unable to act due to internal disagreement, and thus failed to “exercise its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and stability”.<sup>145</sup>

In the heat of the crisis on 31 October 1956, President Eisenhower was not entirely convinced that a special session of the General Assembly invoking “Uniting for Peace” would

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<sup>140</sup> Waage 1996: 320-321.

<sup>141</sup> *FRUS 1955-1957*, 16:840. The President planned to consult the Security Council first thing in the morning [on 30 October 1956], before the USSR could get there.

<sup>142</sup> Memorandum by Geren, 16 April 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2548.

<sup>143</sup> Pruden, Caroline. 1998:16. *Conditional Partners: Eisenhower, the United Nations, and the search for a permanent peace*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

<sup>144</sup> Pruden 1998: 248, 262.

<sup>145</sup> Kyle 2003:365; UN A/RES/377 (V), 3 November 1950.

be the best possible solution. His main objection was that he was not sure it would have the desired limiting effect on the British and French plans. However, under the circumstances – where handing the issue over to the General Assembly received increased support in the United Nations – Eisenhower thought it favourable to go along with the plans and thus have a reasonable chance of controlling the special session. Otherwise the special session might take place anyway, but with the Soviet Union in charge. Eisenhower also hoped a General Assembly resolution might avoid the crisis becoming even more severe than it already was.<sup>146</sup> The special session of the General Assembly was called on in a Security Council Resolution on 31 October.<sup>147</sup> Ironically, the first time the resolution was employed it was against two Western powers blocking the Council, and not the Soviet Union.

The General Assembly's special session commenced on 1 November. Dulles made a personal appearance to introduce an American proposal for a ceasefire resolution. This resolution, in reality a severe condemnation of Britain, France and Israel, was passed with an overwhelming majority on the night between 1 and 2 November. Both Egypt and Israel accepted the ceasefire on 3 November, but the two European states were not prepared to give up. No French or British soldiers had yet landed in Egypt, but the British were firm in their position to go on with the invasion as planned. Their reasoning was that they could not leave the Suez Canal area to its own justice with Egypt and Israel still in conflict with each other. One possibility, however, was to follow up on a Canadian proposal of the establishment of a United Nations force that could police the war zone. This would allow the British and French troops to pull out without completely losing face.<sup>148</sup>

The resolution establishing a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) was adopted in the General Assembly on 4 November. Because it was the first time the United Nations had ever dispatched a force, however, it was going to take some time to form it. In the meantime the war continued in Egypt. On 5 and 6 November, British and French soldiers landed outside of Port Said in Egypt. On the morning of 5 November Israel also made one final conquest, occupying the important Sharm el-Sheikh on the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula just in time to be in possession of the area for the duration of the ceasefire.<sup>149</sup> The US was not the only superpower demanding an end to the war. Having crushed the upheaval in Hungary, the Soviet Union had turned its focus to the Middle East. Despite US efforts to keep the Soviet

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<sup>146</sup> Memorandum by Greene, 31 October 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 16:889.

<sup>147</sup> UN S/3721, res. 119, 31 October 1956.

<sup>148</sup> Waage 1996:337-338; Kyle 2003:403; Neff, Donald. 1981:396-397. *Warriors at Suez: Eisenhower takes America into the Middle East*. New York: The Linden Press/Simon & Schuster.

<sup>149</sup> Neff 1981:400,407; Kyle 2003:444-446, 461; Waage 1996:344.

Union out of the conflict, on 5 November the Soviet premier Nikolai Bulganin sent letters to the Israelis, the British and the French, threatening them with military action if they did not immediately stop their advance.<sup>150</sup> The hostilities finally ended on 7 November, after Britain and France agreed to a ceasefire the previous day.<sup>151</sup> 6 November was a good day for Eisenhower. Not only did Britain and France finally accept the UN ceasefire, but Eisenhower was also re-elected for a second term in the White House with an overwhelming majority, though with a Democratic majority in Congress.<sup>152</sup>

It had largely been US pressure on the Europeans that had convinced them to back down. Britain was in dire need of oil and money. The pound sterling had deteriorated severely since the start of the crisis, and the only way out of the financial quagmire the British currency was heading into would be a fresh flow of cash from the International Money Fund (IMF), which was blocked by the Americans for as long as the British continued to oppose the UN. Likewise, the British were dependent upon a continuous flow of petroleum. With the Suez Canal closed by Nasser and oil pipelines blown up by other Arab states, the supply was at stake.<sup>153</sup> Looking for ways to make the aggressors back down, however, the United States was reluctant to allow Britain the requested money and oil, and thus British Prime Minister Anthony Eden was forced to give up on Suez. The battle in the Middle East was not worth fighting at the risk of ruining Britain's economy.<sup>154</sup> In addition, the British government faced problems with the domestic public opinion. Fresh polls showed that the public disagreed with the government's acts in the Middle East.<sup>155</sup> The French government was not prepared to fight for the Suez Canal without Britain, and thus the British and French troops were pulled out from Sinai by late December.<sup>156</sup>

Even though Eisenhower had been absolutely furious with his European partners, he was not prepared to let their differences over Suez ruin the prospect of future cooperation in the Middle East. The Soviet Union was still the main threat, in Eisenhower's eyes, and in the battle against "the Bear", the US needed allies. Already the day after the ceasefire, Eisenhower had made up his mind: There was no point in "indulging in recriminations with the British, but rather that we should jointly consider what should be done in the face of the

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<sup>150</sup> Shlaim 2000:181.

<sup>151</sup> Waage 1996:344.

<sup>152</sup> Hahn 2004:206, 212, 214.

<sup>153</sup> Waage 1996:343-344; Petersen, Tore T. 2000:94. *The Middle East Between the Great Powers: Anglo-American Conflict and Cooperation, 1952-7*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

<sup>154</sup> Waage 1996:344.

<sup>155</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation between the President, Secretary Dulles and Mr. Hoover Jr. drafted by Macomber, 7 November 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 16:1051.

<sup>156</sup> Spiegel 1985: 77.

Russian threat.”<sup>157</sup> Eisenhower had come to realize that alienating his number one ally in the Middle East was detrimental to American interests in the region. Without British help and friendship, the US would not be able to realize its own goals. For instance, Eisenhower worried that without British help the American intelligence in the Middle East was incomplete.<sup>158</sup>

### ***Convincing Israel***

Israel was the undisputed military victor of the war. When the UN ceasefire came into effect on midnight between 6 and 7 November, Israel occupied the entire Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip.<sup>159</sup> This meant that Israel also controlled the Straits of Tiran, which the Israelis claimed was crucial for shipping to and from Israel, since this was the only access point to the port in Eilat. Without Israeli access to the Straits, the only other access to the sea was on the other side of the country – in the Mediterranean. The Egyptians had prevented Israeli ships from passing through the Suez Canal since the 1948 war, and in order to avoid further disturbance in water-borne supplies, the Israeli government considered it a vital interest to maintain control over Tiran, or at least to ensure that Egypt was not given the option of blocking them.<sup>160</sup>

In a speech to the Knesset on 7 November Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion strongly hinted that it was Israel’s intention to hold on to the Straits of Tiran and the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>161</sup> However, he had assured Dulles via Israel’s Ambassador to the US, Abba Eban, on 1 November 1956 that Israel would not “hold on to any territory occupied as a result of present military operations”. It was their intention to withdraw, but only under conditions that would “assure Israel’s security and maritime freedom.”<sup>162</sup> In an attempt to persuade the Israelis, Eisenhower appealed directly to the Israeli Prime Minister on 7 November urging him to withdraw the Israeli forces. This did not have the desired effect. The Israelis were not

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<sup>157</sup> Memorandum by Macomber, 7 November 1956:1049.

<sup>158</sup> Petersen, Tore T. 2008:215-216. “Post-Suez Consequences: Anglo-American Relations in the Middle East from Eisenhower to Nixon” in (ed.) Simon C. Smith, *Reassessing Suez 1956: New Perspectives on the Crisis and its Aftermath*, Aldershot: Ashgate; Memorandum by Macomber, 7 November 1956:1049.

<sup>159</sup> Shlaim 2000:179.

<sup>160</sup> Shlaim 2000:182-182; Pappé, Ilan. 2004:162. *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. In discussions over the same straits prior to the outbreak of war in 1967, a group of Arab ambassadors who acted as spokesmen for all the Arab states pointed out that since Israel had not had any access to the Straits of Tiran from its establishment and until 1956, such access could hardly “be of vital importance to the Israelis.” Rusk to several diplomatic stations, 27 May 1967, *CFPF 1967-1969*, box 1789.

<sup>161</sup> Shlaim 2000:179; Kyle 2003:477-478.

<sup>162</sup> Memorandum by Bergus, 8 November 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2554.

prepared to comply with the United Nations or Eisenhower's demand for immediate and unconditional withdrawal.<sup>163</sup>

It had been Eisenhower's wish to convince Israel of withdrawal without turning to threats. As this proved difficult, however, the options discussed were all intended to affect the monetary remittances Israel received from the US. It was within the power of the US government to impose either an embargo or taxation on all funds, including private contributions, sent to Israel. Both were expected to have a significant effect on the Israeli government, hopefully enough to make Israel withdraw to the armistice line.<sup>164</sup> This was the only acceptable solution to the US, and it was regarded as crucial that a withdrawal was not postponed for too long. "The only question with regard to the immediacy of the withdrawal [from Egyptian territory] would be that no military or political vacuum is created by the withdrawal of the forces."<sup>165</sup> Because UNEF troops entered Sinai on 15 November 1956, there should be no reason to fear such a vacuum anymore.<sup>166</sup> However, Israel refused to withdraw before two crucial terms were fulfilled: that Israel was guaranteed passage through Tiran and that there would be no more *Fedayeen* raids from Gaza.<sup>167</sup>

President Eisenhower sent a letter to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion expressing disappointment that Israel had failed to withdraw in accordance with the General Assembly resolution of 2 November 1956, urging Israel to withdraw immediately.<sup>168</sup> Certain minor withdrawals were made, but the Jewish state was not willing to give up Sinai until it was assured it would be granted access to the Gulf of Aqaba. Israel also continued to control Gaza, but this was more a means of hindering Egypt from controlling it than because Israel wanted to hold on to the problematic strip of land. "[W]ho would want it?" Dulles wondered about Gaza.<sup>169</sup>

The US administration's hesitancy towards imposing sanctions against Israel was also affected by the domestic political situation in the US: Eisenhower was under pressure from

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<sup>163</sup> Eisenhower to Ben-Gurion, 7 November 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 16:1063-1064.

<sup>164</sup> Memorandum by Macomber, 7 November 1956:1050.

<sup>165</sup> Memorandum for the President by Wilkins, 21 November 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2548.

<sup>166</sup> Neff 1981:422.

<sup>167</sup> Shlaim 2000:182. The *Fedayeen* were sabotage units consisting of Palestinian refugees from Gaza, organized by Egypt starting in 1955. Their attacks on Israeli territory lasted more than a year previous to the 1956 war, and this was one of several factors that made Israel eager to launch the Sinai campaign. Shlaim 2000:128; Aanestad, Bjarte. 2010:26. "Pax Norvegica? Det norske fredsengasjementet og bidraget til United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, 1956-1970" [in Norwegian], unpublished master's thesis, University of Oslo.

<sup>168</sup> Eisenhower to Ben-Gurion, 3 February 1957, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 17:82. The resolution Eisenhower refers to is Resolution 997 (ES-I), adopted on the 562<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting on 2 November 1956 as a part of the First Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly.

<sup>169</sup> Transcript of a telephone conversation between the President and Secretary Dulles, 12 January 1957, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 17:30.

the new Democratic majority in Congress. Several Israel-friendly senators were demanding that the Republican administration did not support a solution that would return the Israeli security situation to the *status quo ante bellum*, the pre-war situation. In short, they agreed with Israel that it would be most unfortunate if Egypt were to be allowed to continue blocking Israeli transit through international waterways and *fedayeen* raids from Gaza.<sup>170</sup> Despite the fact that Israel had been the aggressor in the war, and despite the continued Israeli presence on Egyptian territories, the US was hesitant to impose sanctions on Israel alone. As long as the Americans believed Egypt also violated certain UN resolutions, Eisenhower and Dulles were not prepared to support sanctions against Israel.<sup>171</sup>

Israel did not make this easy. In an attempt to include certain favourable conditions to a withdrawal the Israelis were realizing they sooner or later would have to accept, Israel presented an *aide-mémoire* where they accepted the presence of UNEF in the Gulf of Aqaba area, but not in Gaza. This was a poorly disguised strategy for Israel's real goal: to remain in control of Sharm el-Sheik. Because of the Israeli "take-it-or-leave-it policy", the US Permanent Representative to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., feared that a General Assembly resolution imposing sanctions on Israel was inevitable.<sup>172</sup>

Eventually the Americans tried to offer Israel a carrot. On 11 February Dulles notified the Israelis that the US viewed the Gulf of Aqaba as an international waterway, and that American ships would be willing to ensure that the right of innocent passage was observed.<sup>173</sup> Through this, the US actually went a long way in accepting Israeli demands by declaring its support for viewing the Gulf as an international waterway, and in Israel it was regarded as a security guarantee for a considerable Israeli interest; which the Jewish state had sought from the superpower for a long time. Regardless of this, however, Israel was still not prepared to cave in. Ben-Gurion continued to resist the demands for withdrawal, and he was furious with the US for putting pressure on Israel when he believed they had let Egypt off the hook for blocking Israeli transit in the Gulf of Aqaba.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Kyle 2003:538; Ban-On, Mordechai. 1995:294. *The Gates of Gaza: Israel's Road to Suez and Back, 1955-1957*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Scholarly and Reference Division; Telephone conversation between Dulles and Lodge, 12 February 1957, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 17:142-144.

<sup>171</sup> Telephone conversation between the President and Dulles, 12 January 1957:30; Dulles to the US mission at the UN, 11 January 1957, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 17:28. It remains somewhat unclear from these sources what the Americans believed the Egyptian violations consisted of, but it is likely that the violations in question are the *Fedayeen* raids and the Egyptian resistance to Israeli passage through the Suez Canal, as is frequently referred to elsewhere. Dulles to the US mission at the UN, 23 January 1957, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 17:44.

<sup>172</sup> Shlaim 2000:182-183; Lodge to State Department, 23 January 1957, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 17: 45-47.

<sup>173</sup> Dulles to the Israeli Embassy, 11 February 1957, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 17:133.

<sup>174</sup> Lawson to State, 12 February 1957, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 17:148.

Due to the unfavourable Israeli reply, the Americans turned to sticks. Making the pressure public, Eisenhower chose to condemn the Israeli failure to withdraw to the Armistice Agreements of the 1948 war on radio and television. "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?" he asked rhetorically.<sup>175</sup> And finally, towards the end of February 1957, the US was prepared to discuss sanctions. In a draft resolution from Dulles to the US United Nations delegation on 21 February, all governments were urged to withhold assistance to Israel.<sup>176</sup>

Israel was left with little choice. Foreign Minister Golda Meir announced to the UN General Assembly on 1 March 1957 that a complete Israeli withdrawal would take place shortly. What eventually made Israel withdraw was the threat of UN sanctions; the risk of complete isolation in world matters; and the combination of the United States' assurances and refusal to relent. On 8 March the last Israeli troops left Egyptian territories, transferring the power to UNEF. In the end, the only territorial modification that came as a result of the 1956 war was that the demilitarized zone in El Auja on the border between Israel and Sinai was remilitarized and in effect became Israeli territory. This is not entirely without significance, however, since El Auja was an important strategic location from which attacks both on Israel and Egypt had been launched during the 1948 war. Despite this, this was a minor territorial change considering the overwhelming Israeli victory in the war.<sup>177</sup>

How important was the role of the United States in ending the war in 1956? Historian and journalist Keith Kyle argues that it was important, but the situation was also unique. Eisenhower's firm stand in 1956 achieved something rare – Israel backed down following US pressure. However, the conditions were ideal. First of all, Eisenhower had just stood through the crisis in the Middle East while holding the fort in the US election. With a landslide victory, he had the necessary popular support at home and thus he was in a position to be bold in the Middle East. Secondly, the pressure put upon Israel was not singularly American. As Kyle emphasizes, a second superpower, the Soviet Union, was also working towards an end of the Middle Eastern conflict. Left standing alone, there was little else Israel could do but obey.<sup>178</sup> The question remains if this occasion was unique enough for it to have been impossible for the United States to perform similar peace-enforcing actions in the years to

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<sup>175</sup> Address by President Eisenhower, 20 February 1957, published in *Department of State Bulletin*, 11 March 1957, vol. 36, no. 924:387-391.

<sup>176</sup> Dulles to the US mission at the UN, 21 February 1957, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 17:233.

<sup>177</sup> Bar-On 1995:300-301; Hahn 2004:216; Shlaim 2000:184; Aanestad 2010:25,48.

<sup>178</sup> Kyle 2003:479.

follow, or if the failure to create peace in the Middle East rather was an expression of lack of will to do so.

### ***A New Middle Eastern Grouping?***

As a result of the US role in ending the 1956 war, the Eisenhower administration was more popular in Arab countries than before. For instance, the signals from Nasser were that he hoped the US would fill the vacuum in commerce and industry created by the Anglo-French withdrawal from most of their industrial and commercial interests in the Middle East.<sup>179</sup> However, the Arab opinion of the US was rapidly subject to change. The Americans were surprised at what they perceived as lack of gratitude expressed by the Arabs concerning the US role in forcing the Israeli, British and French troops to withdraw from Egyptian territories.<sup>180</sup> There existed a mutual suspicion between the Americans and the Arabs. The Americans believed that Egypt and Syria, both condescendingly described as “neutralist”, were forming closer relationships with the Soviet Union.<sup>181</sup> Nasser, Eisenhower concluded, was an “evil influence”, and the problem in the 1956 war had not been the British and French ambition to overthrow him, but their timing.<sup>182</sup>

The Arabs, on the other hand, were disappointed that the tendency they had expected to develop after the 1956 war, with a more Arab-friendly United States, had not been fulfilled. For instance, Egyptian Ambassador to the US, Dr. Ahmed Hussain, communicated what he believed was a common perception in Egypt: the US was “employing economic warfare against Egypt”.<sup>183</sup> It can also be argued that the lukewarm relationship between the Arab states and the United States was a turn back to a previous state, rather than a new development. The relationship had not been good prior to the 1956 war. There was a temporary improvement in the Arab regard for the US post-Suez, but there were other factors that were just as important in determining how the Americans were perceived in the Middle

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<sup>179</sup> Memorandum by Hoffacker, 18 November 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2546. Nasser’s emissary, Mr. Amin, declared that “Nasser wanted the US Government to know that the British and French are finished commercially and industrially in the Middle East”.

<sup>180</sup> In a meeting with the Egyptian ambassador to the US, Dr. Ahmed Hussein, Secretary Dulles mentioned that he had been “mystified by Egyptian and Syrian reactions to US efforts of late last year [1956] and early this year to stop the attack against Egypt and to remove the Israelis from the Gaza Strip and Sharm el-Sheikh”. Memorandum by Stabler, 8 October 1957, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2546.

<sup>181</sup> Rountree to Dulles, attachment (“Revised Proposal for a New Middle Eastern Grouping”. The actual document is not dated, but it is evident from the text that the document is written sometime between 1 and 3 December 1956), 5 December 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2548; Damms, Richard V. 2008:180. “In Search of ‘Some Big, Imaginative Plan’: The Eisenhower Administration and American strategy in the Middle East after Suez” in (ed.) Simon C. Smith, *Reassessing Suez*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

<sup>182</sup> Eisenhower to Dulles, 12 December 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957*, 16:1297.

<sup>183</sup> Memorandum by Stabler, 9 October 1957, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2546.

East. Most importantly, perhaps, was the fact that many Arabs considered the US withdrawal from the funding of the Aswan Dam a decisive trigger to the conflict in the first place.<sup>184</sup>

The apparent solution in order to mend the bad relations and to limit Soviet influence was a rethinking of the American policy in the Middle East, and more specifically increasing the American presence in the region. One suggestion was for the US to join the Baghdad Pact.<sup>185</sup> Late in 1956 members of the State Department began to contemplate another option; the potential establishment of a new organization in the Middle East loosely modelled on either the Baghdad Pact or the Arab League. The idea was that an organization such as this might establish stronger ties between the Arab countries and the United States, and that intra-Arab bonds would grow stronger. This might in turn avoid the formation of similar ties to form between the Middle Eastern countries and the Soviet Union.<sup>186</sup>

The Americans wanted the organization to engulf the already existing Baghdad Pact that since its establishment in 1955 had largely come to be considered by members and non-members alike as a tool for British policy in the Middle East. The new organization should, in addition to the Middle Eastern Baghdad Pact members, preferably include other Arab states. Egypt and Syria would also be invited, but they were not expected to accept. State Department hoped, however, that their potential refusal to accept such an invitation would isolate them from the rest of the Arab community, and “emphasize their close ties with the Soviet Bloc.” It does appear that this desire to create Cold War camps in the Middle East was an attempt to scare the other Arab states away from the Soviet Bloc. In a longer perspective, the Americans hoped, the success of this organization might make Egypt and Syria see that they had no other choice than to join. Britain would not be invited to join.<sup>187</sup>

One problem was that such an organization would not be able to include both the Arab states and Israel. It was even argued that it was to be expected that the organization would be a place for harbouring anti-Israeli sentiments, but that this might be the price the United States would have to pay in order to establish stability in the region.<sup>188</sup> In addition to the overly optimistic view on the degree of success the organization would achieve, the problematic relationship the potential grouping inevitably would have with Israel was the single most complicated part of the idea. In the discussion that followed the proposal, it was pointed out

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<sup>184</sup> Khalidi, Rashid. 1993:536-537. “Consequences of the Suez Crisis in the Arab World” in (ed.) Hourani, Albert, Philip S. Khoury and Mary C. Wilson. *The Modern Middle East: A Reader*. London /New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.

<sup>185</sup> Petersen 2000:104.

<sup>186</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 5 December 1956.

<sup>187</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 5 December 1956.

<sup>188</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 5 December 1956.

that US encouragement of the establishment of an organization open to all of Israel's neighbours without an accompanying security guarantee to Israel would not become popular in certain quarters in the United States, or, understandably, in Israel.<sup>189</sup>

If such an organization were to be established, the degree and manner of US involvement had to be determined. Secretary Dulles did not wish for the United States to be a member of the intended organization.<sup>190</sup> The US was already under pressure to become a member of the Baghdad Pact, from the members of the Pact, and from American representatives both in the Baghdad Pact countries and in government agencies in Washington. However, the State Department strongly advised against joining. There was fear that US adherence might aggravate the Soviet Union, the Israelis and even some of the Arab countries.<sup>191</sup> Thus, the US should not be a formal member. Instead, there was the possibility of making a "unilateral declaration of protection for the members [of the intended alternative Middle Eastern grouping] from Communist aggression".<sup>192</sup> A unilateral declaration was the part of the proposed changes that eventually prevailed as the most attainable alternative.

In the end, the idea for a new US sponsored security organization in the Middle East was abandoned. Dulles decided that US policy in the region would be maintained on a bilateral basis as before.<sup>193</sup> This decision also put an end to any further discussion on US adherence to the Baghdad Pact. A further consequence of this decision was that the US did not have to make the difficult choice between Israel and the Arabs. Instead, the US government planned to make a unilateral move to signal US intentions to maintain a strong relationship with the Arab countries in the region, and to contain the Soviet Union.

### ***The Eisenhower Doctrine***

On 5 January 1957, President Eisenhower held a speech for Congress, where he declared the need for joint action between Congress and the Executive Branch – his government. This statement, later called the Eisenhower Doctrine, was supposed to be the guiding principle for US foreign policy in the Middle East for the years to come. In reality, however, the Eisenhower Doctrine was invoked mostly as a show of force. It only resulted in actual military action once, during the crisis in Lebanon in 1958.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Murphy to Rountree, 3 December 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2548.

<sup>190</sup> Hoover to Murphy, 10 December 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2548.

<sup>191</sup> Memorandum for the President by Wilkins, 21 November 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2548.

<sup>192</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 5 December 1956.

<sup>193</sup> Hoover to Murphy, 10 December 1956.

<sup>194</sup> Spiegel 1985:86-87; Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Special message to the Congress on the Situation in the Middle East", 5 January 1957, available through the American Presidency Project.

The primary reasons that the Eisenhower administration wanted the Eisenhower Doctrine was to fill the power vacuum after Britain and France lost their importance in the Middle East after the 1956 war; to have a tool to deter Arab antagonism; and perhaps most importantly, to send a clear message to the Soviet Union. The United States would not accept increased Soviet influence in the Middle East. There was some discussion prior to Eisenhower's address to Congress on whether the doctrine would also mention hostility between the Middle Eastern states or merely tackle "communist imperialism". Had the former been included, the US would in principle have been a warrantor for peace in the Middle East. However, it was decided that the Eisenhower Doctrine would be targeted at communism specifically, and not on Middle Eastern conflict generally, seeing as "Communist imperialism is the principle danger in the Middle East."<sup>195</sup>

By instituting the Eisenhower Doctrine the US administration asked Congress, which according to the US Constitution formally had to authorize all US military action, to authorize the Executive Branch to

authorize such assistance and cooperation to include the employment of the armed forces of the United States to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid, against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism.<sup>196</sup>

This allowed the Executive Branch to take action under the terms and conditions of the Eisenhower Doctrine without having to seek further permission in Congress.<sup>197</sup> In principle, the Eisenhower Doctrine could be viewed as *carte blanche* for invasion in the Middle East if necessary, though historians have stressed that Eisenhower's interpretation of the doctrine was a strict one.<sup>198</sup> Regardless of how the Eisenhower Doctrine was applied, however, in its wording it allowed the US to act more unilaterally in the Middle East. In effect this meant that the Americans were able to pursue a more separate policy from Britain and France than before. As Dulles pointed out: "We [are] not seeking [to] step into [the] previous relationship

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<sup>195</sup> Murphy to Dulles, 15 December 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2548.

<sup>196</sup> Eisenhower, 5 January 1957.

<sup>197</sup> Hammon, Paul Y. 1969:117-118. *The Cold War Years: American Foreign Policy Since 1945*. New York/Chicago/San Francisco/Atlanta: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. There were dissenting voices that worried that what Congress really was asked to do was to "authorize unspecified future actions". This was one reason it took Congress till March 1957 before the Eisenhower Doctrine, with some alterations, was passed.

<sup>198</sup> Bunch, Clea Lutz. 2008:116. "Supporting the Brave Young King: The Suez Crisis and Eisenhower's New Approach to Jordan, 1953-1958" in (ed.) Smith, Simon C. *Reassessing Suez: New Perspectives on the Crisis and its Aftermath*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited. The only time the Eisenhower Doctrine was ever employed, was during the crisis in Lebanon in 1958, when Eisenhower was asked to intervene to save Camille Chamoun's presidency in the clash between Christians and Moslems. Despite the fact that it may have avoided a war, the US intervention was by no means a peace initiative –it was a display of power and an attempt to assemble credibility for US security assurances to Middle Eastern states. Further, the purpose of the intervention was to avoid a "Nasserite revolution" in Lebanon, to contain the Soviet Union from gaining support in the region, and to discourage an Israeli intervention justified in containing Nasser. Hahn 2004:240-242.

[with the] UK and France with [the] Middle East area.”<sup>199</sup> In effect, the Eisenhower Doctrine marked the final end of Britain’s dominance in the Middle East, and it firmly established the United States as the dominant power.<sup>200</sup>

### ***Comprehensive Peace or Unilateral Assurances?***

There was nothing in the Eisenhower Doctrine indicating that the United States was working towards a comprehensive peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, with the newly pronounced dedication to the region, there was hope that the US administration would lend a hand to the attempts of creating peace. Eisenhower had expressed that he wanted to keep a more balanced position than his predecessors. Many Arabs considered the way he handled the war in 1956 and the immediate aftermath of it a confirmation of this point of view. In the months that followed, however, there seemed to be a gradual transformation in Eisenhower’s esteem in the Middle East. The Arab states were not convinced that the President really tried to maintain a balanced policy towards the Middle East. Israel was aggravated that they did not receive any US security assurances. By trying to befriend everyone, the result seemed to be that the United States instead estranged the lot.

The Eisenhower Doctrine, while being a potential tool for US economic or military intervention to stabilize the Middle East, was not a peace initiative. It was in fact not at all directed towards peace – its specific target was to deter communism. The unilateral nature of the doctrine might have been a way for the US government to assure that a similar situation like that of the autumn of 1956 would not happen again. The Eisenhower Doctrine was a way for the United States to consolidate and clarify the American position in the Middle East. It was a way of ensuring that no power vacuum would arise as the British and French positions were diminished, and to ensure that the Soviet Union did not increase its importance.

It can be tempting to emphasize Eisenhower’s firm stand when faced with the difficult task of countering his allies and friends which might have an unfortunate effect on the results of the election he was in the middle of. It is, however, important to identify why Eisenhower was so adamant about standing up for what he believed was right. Had he sided with his allies, Eisenhower feared that the Soviet Union might increase its influence in the Middle East. In 1956, Eisenhower’s Cold War aims had the effect of giving the US a considerable role in establishing a ceasefire and making the aggressors withdraw from occupied territories in the Middle East. However, making comprehensive peace after the war did not fit as well

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<sup>199</sup> Dulles to Moscow, London and Paris, 19 January 1957, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2549.

<sup>200</sup> Petersen 2000:107.

with the overall strategy of the Americans, and thus it was sacrificed in favour of Cold War goals.

## Wishing Wells and Good Intentions

Water was a crucial point of disagreement from the beginning of the multi-faceted conflict in the Middle East. How the scarce resources should be divided remained an important question for decades, and it was indirectly one of the reasons why the Arab-Israeli conflict again erupted into war in 1967. The Jordan River was the main supplier of fresh water for several countries in the region, and thus it became a point of struggle between Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and, even though it was not a riparian, Egypt.<sup>201</sup> Eric Johnston's 1955 failure to convince the riparian countries to the Jordan River to sign the Johnston plan was one of several reasons that convinced the US government that the time was not ripe for a comprehensive peace agreement. Despite the Johnston mission's limited success, the US government continued to promote the unsigned Johnston plan as a "yardstick" for at least another decade.<sup>202</sup>

Thus, problems over shared water resources remained important in US policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict for years to come. There was considerable fear in the US government that the water issue might result in an increase in intensity of the conflict in the Middle East, or even trigger another war. Since the riparian states did not cooperate in their diversion schemes, they frequently ran the risk of stepping on each other's toes. Additionally, the US worried that underdevelopment and scarce water resources would lead to the spread of

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<sup>201</sup> In 1958, Egypt and Syria formed the United Arab Republic (UAR), which lasted until 1961. Egypt continued to be known as UAR until 1971. To avoid confusion, however, in this thesis Egypt will be used for the entire period. Egypt was involved in the Jordan waters conflict in several ways, for instance because of its union with Syria and through its involvement in the West Bank. Cohen, Warren I. 1994:279. "Balancing American Interests in the Middle East: Lyndon Baines Johnson vs. Gamal Abdul Nasser" in Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker (ed.) *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>202</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Eric Johnston had limited success with his missions to the Middle East in 1953-1955. While he managed to make the Middle Eastern states agree to the principle of water sharing, no formal agreement was ever signed, and in reality the riparian states rejected political cooperation over the scarce water resource.

communism in the region.<sup>203</sup> In what way did the US handle the Jordan waters controversy after 1956? Why did the US government continue its efforts in the Jordan waters question, and why did it eventually give up? What was the purpose of US involvement in the water issue post-Suez?

### ***Eisenhower's Final Efforts***

At the end of Eisenhower's presidency, belief in any progress towards Middle Eastern peace was close to zero. There was a conscious decision to avoid any US involvement in comprehensive peace initiatives over the Jordan waters controversy.<sup>204</sup> It was even believed by many State Department officials that one of the main problems with securing local approval of the Johnston plan had been the US sponsorship of it. It made little sense, therefore, to initiate a new venture with the same basic flaw.<sup>205</sup> In addition, the death of Secretary Dulles on 24 May 1959 affected the Eisenhower administration's foreign policy engagement. Dulles was replaced by former Assistant Secretary Christian A. Herter, who did not have the experience or prestige of his predecessor.<sup>206</sup> Hence the political will and opportunity of peacemaking in the Middle East in the final years of Eisenhower's presidency were non-existing.

US policy towards the Jordan waters controversy became one of lying low and testing the waters, hoping that the relative calm that had existed in the Arab-Israeli conflict since the 1956 war would continue. Instead of cooperative efforts the United States sponsored unilateral development projects, provided they did not exceed the individual allocations granted by the Johnston plan which the Americans continued to consider a yardstick for fair water sharing in the Middle East. First, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan announced their East Ghor project. This was a canal that would divert water from the Yarmouk River, a tributary to the Jordan River, to East Ghor. Because the plan was found to be consistent with the Jordanian kingdom's allocations according to the Johnston plan, and because both US engineers and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) considered the project reasonable, the US State Department endorsed it in 1958, despite Israeli protests.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Lowi, Miriam L. 1993:81-82. *Water and Power: The politics of a scarce resource in the Jordan River basin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>204</sup> Hahn 2004:252-253.

<sup>205</sup> Draft paper by Troxel, "An Alternative to the Jordan Valley Plan", 5 June 1956, *Records relating to the Near East Arms Initiative 1963-1964*, box 1.

<sup>206</sup> Hahn 2004:233.

<sup>207</sup> Hahn 2004:253.

The following year, however, Israeli construction on a water development project of their own caused further problems. The National Water Carrier, that was to be completed in 1964, would divert water from Lake Tiberias to the Negev.<sup>208</sup> This project received massive protests from the neighbouring countries, who threatened to divert the headwaters to the Jordan River into Lebanon and Syria before the river even reached Israel. In order to discourage the Arab states from taking such a drastic measure, and to avoid further controversy, the US only partly supported the Israeli project. The pretext for the US dismissal of the Israeli project was that the Israeli diversion exceeded the allocations granted to Israel under the Johnston plan, which the Americans still considered the fairest measurement for water sharing in the Jordan Valley.<sup>209</sup>

Israel sought both economic and political support from the Americans for its project, however, and it was thus important for the Israelis to establish that the National Water Carrier construction was not in conflict with the Johnston plan. Nevertheless, the Americans refused to give Israel the economic and political backing it sought.<sup>210</sup> The main objection to the Israeli plan was that it might “impair prospects for obtaining an international agreement which we consider essential if the interests of all riparians are to be protected.”<sup>211</sup> In short, the US government was desperately trying to remain friends with everyone.

In the long run, however, it became difficult for the US government to avoid supporting the Israeli project. In a document imprecisely dated to “circa 1960”, a review of the US position towards Israeli claims shows that the discussion went back and forth between Washington and Tel Aviv regarding the terms in which the United States and Israel might agree to cooperate over a Jordan water development project. The discussion culminated in a re-examination of what Israel and the US based their interpretation of the Johnston plan upon. This revealed that the Israelis interpreted the plan based on a different document than the Americans.<sup>212</sup> Since there was no signed version of the Johnston plan, neither could be proven wrong, and this discrepancy in interpretations would become a problem for the practical applicability of the Johnston plan for the years to come.

In the following months, the Israeli government threatened to implement an even more controversial plan. There were no prospects of international cooperation over the Jordan

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<sup>208</sup> Shlaim 2000:228; Hart to the Secretary, 7 November 1959, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2556.

<sup>209</sup> Hahn 2004:253-254.

<sup>210</sup> Eban to Herter, 4 May 1959, *Records Relating to the Eric Johnston Mission and Jordan River Waters, 1945-1959*, box 3; Memorandum for the US UN delegation drafted by Hamilton, 12 Sept 1959, *Records Relating to the Eric Johnston Mission and Jordan River Waters, 1945-1959*, box 3.

<sup>211</sup> Memorandum drafted by Hamilton, 12 Sept 1959.

<sup>212</sup> “Johnston Plan Chronology”, no specific date (“Circa 1960”) or author provided, *Records Relating to the Eric Johnston Mission and Jordan River Waters, 1945-1959*, box 3.

waters, and the domestic political situation in the US made the refusal to support the original, less controversial Israeli plan difficult. Thus, the US eventually endorsed the original Israeli project.<sup>213</sup>

### ***Revival of the Johnston Mission?***

Even though the prospects seemed bleak, there were those who wanted to explore the possibility of a new US effort in the Middle East to negotiate between the Jordan River basin users. The biggest optimist in this respect was former Ambassador Eric Johnston himself. After a visit to the Middle East in 1959, he wrote to the State Department, suggesting a re-examination of the Jordan Valley project where he had been the chief negotiator between Israel and the Arab states. In the original Johnston mission, the goal had been to achieve agreement between the Middle Eastern states on a plan for cooperation on water development with the expressed intention that this eventually would facilitate settling of Palestinian refugees. Eric Johnston's impression upon rekindling contact with his Middle Eastern acquaintances was that Egypt had mellowed to the idea of water cooperation, and he believed Egypt might be the key to convince the other Arab states to return to a water development scheme in accordance with the original Johnston plan.<sup>214</sup>

Eric Johnston continued to believe in the possible revival of his work in the Middle East. On 13 October 1959, he had talks with Egyptian Foreign Minister Dr. Mahmud Fawzi regarding the Jordan River development. While this conversation was made on a non-official, personal basis, it seems clear that Johnston's intention was to research whether his engagement in a new mission to the Middle East would be possible. Johnston suggested to Fawzi that he might discuss the Jordan waters issue with Nasser again, and according to what Johnston reported back to State Department, Fawzi was "receptive".<sup>215</sup> With the Egyptian Foreign Minister on board, Eric Johnston and some officials in the State Department believed there was reason to hope Nasser might accept a new round of Johnston negotiations.<sup>216</sup> However this was mostly a straw of hope Johnston was clinging to. The State Department did not feel the need to formally refuse the initiative as long as it was carried out by Johnston "on a personal basis". When faced with an actual inquiry of Johnston's as to the possibility of a renewal of the mission, however, the State Department declined to support this.<sup>217</sup> Pursuing support for the Johnston plan as it originally had been intended had already been abandoned

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<sup>213</sup> Hahn 2004:253-254.

<sup>214</sup> Johnston to Herter (acting), 9 April 1959, *FRUS 1958-1960*, 13:160.

<sup>215</sup> Hart to the Secretary, 7 November 1959, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2556.

<sup>216</sup> Hart to Dillon, *FRUS 1958-1960*, 13:218-222.

<sup>217</sup> Hahn 2004:253.

years ago. The linkage between the development of shared water resources and the Palestinian refugee problem made a continuation of the Johnston plan particularly difficult. Thus the refugee problem was separated from the Johnston plan in further US planning.<sup>218</sup>

While the US government ceased to try to achieve formal agreement over the Johnston plan, it was still considered as a tacit accord that would serve as a yardstick to govern the riparian outtake of water from the Jordan River and its tributaries. For the following years the US used the Johnston plan as a measurement for whether they considered proposed water development projects in and around the Jordan Valley legal and just. This way they sought to bind the riparian countries unilaterally to the framework of the plan.<sup>219</sup>

The pretext for the US endorsement for Israeli water development had been the Israeli promise of sticking to the Johnston plan allocations. Throughout the autumn of 1959, the Israeli government worried that the US government did not appear to give them as much support for their water development plans as the Israelis believed it did for the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan. Israel also complained that the US government did not believe the Israelis when they assured them that their projects were consistent with the Johnston plan. The US response to this was that it was not so much that they did not believe the Israeli assurances, but that the Israeli interpretation of some of the technical aspects of the Johnston plan differed from the US interpretation.<sup>220</sup> Thus it became important for any US-Israeli cooperation in water questions to settle these differences, and make sure that their interpretations were the same.

One problem with securing a compromise between the US and Israel in this matter was that it would most likely not be one that the Arab states would accept, as the Arabs were considering water development schemes of their own. Thus the US tried to stall the matter and avoid an unconditional acceptance of the Israeli point of view. In addition the Middle East was further destabilized as a result of intra-Arab conflicts. Tension as a result of the Syrian withdrawal from the union with Egypt in 1961, domestic revolt in several of the Arab states and the extensive Egyptian involvement in the Yemen civil war contributed to the already complex political situation in the region. The US government firmly sought to avoid any involvement in the intra-Arab conflict.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> "An Alternative to the Jordan Valley Plan", drafted by Troxel, 5 June 1956, *Records relating to the Near East Arms Initiative, 1963-1964*, box 1; Sosland, Jeffrey K. 2007:65. *Cooperating Rivals: The Riparian Politics of the Jordan River Basin*. Albany: SUNY Press.

<sup>219</sup> Davies to Talbot, 7 October 1964, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1854.

<sup>220</sup> Herter to Tel Aviv, 20 November 1959, CDF 1955-1959, box 2554.

<sup>221</sup> Sosland 2007:77-78; Memorandum by Davies, 31 December 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4075.

The Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy was elected president in November 1960, and took office in January 1961. With him as Vice-President was former senator Lyndon B. Johnson, and Dean Rusk became Secretary of State. Kennedy represented a breath of fresh air in American politics. He presented himself as a man of action, and a man of vision. Already before he became president, Kennedy had shown great interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict. As a senator, Kennedy had advocated a change of US policy towards the Middle East.<sup>222</sup> He greatly admired Israel, but he was also impressed by Arab nationalism and President Nasser in particular. Kennedy wanted to have solid relations with both the Arab states and Israel, a wish that was going to prove difficult to fulfil.<sup>223</sup>

In a letter to Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, President Kennedy assured his colleague that the US would support an Israeli withdrawal project as long as it was within the Johnston plan allocations.<sup>224</sup> Kennedy advocated the link between water development and peace, but in reality the US authorities had already made the decision not to make a new initiative in a project designed to promote both peace and water development.<sup>225</sup>

## ***Water Wars***

In the spring of 1962, the tension that had prevailed over the shared water resources in the Middle East reached new heights. On 8 March, there were “hostile exchanges” between Syria and Israel, and this culminated in an Israeli reprisal on 16-17 March.<sup>226</sup> The Americans were infuriated. First of all there was reason to expect that the tension might interfere with the missions of the near-namesake of Eric Johnston, Dr. Joseph Johnson, who was working as Special Representative for the Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC) in an effort to make the Arab states and Israel to agree to a solution to the Palestine refugee problem.<sup>227</sup> Further, the Israeli reprisal was of a much larger magnitude than what had been directed against it.

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<sup>222</sup> Correspondence shows Senator Kennedy requesting internal State Department documents on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and he made pledges for how he would handle the conflict if he became president. Kennedy made a point of using his support for the State of Israel in his election campaign to be president. One reason for his interest in the region was his travels in the Middle East in 1939 and 1951. Kennedy to Hill, 15 February 1957, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2549; Hill to Kennedy, 13 March 1957, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2549; “Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy in the Senate, June 14, 1960”. (Transcription of speech); Hahn 2004:233; Summitt 2008:27, 30-31.

<sup>223</sup> Summitt 2008:27-28.

<sup>224</sup> Kennedy to Ben-Gurion, 13 June 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:723-725.

<sup>225</sup> Talbot to Rusk, 25 May 1962, attached to Memorandum by McGhee, 1 June 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:693-700.

<sup>226</sup> UN S/5111, res. 171, 9 April 1962.

<sup>227</sup> For details on Joseph Johnson’s missions, see chapter 5.

Representatives from the State Department made it absolutely clear to the Israelis that a raid such as this was completely unacceptable.<sup>228</sup>

In an attempt at explaining the provocation behind the attack, the Israeli Ambassador Harman described Lake Tiberias and its shore as 100 per cent Israeli. The Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (NEA) United Nations Adviser, James M. Ludlow, mentioned that the US did not share this view. The Israelis were deeply disturbed by this notion, as they worried that US hesitancy in this matter would give the Syrians a green light for pursuing sovereignty over an area the Jewish state considered Israeli territory. A clarification from Ludlow specified that because of the demilitarized zone on the Tiberias shore, the territorial status of parts of the shore was in fact undetermined since the General Armistice Agreements from the 1948 war.<sup>229</sup>

Harman's portrayal of the situation was one where the Syrians had repeatedly broken the peace ever since the beginning of February, and that no result had come from the Israeli attempt to take this up with UNTSO. The incident on 8 March, according to the Israelis, was a turning point because the Syrians started using recoilless rifles. The Israeli interpretation was that Syrian shooting had become more militarily organized, and thus it was a defining moment in the Israeli view on the security threat the Syrian shooting posed.<sup>230</sup>

A ceasefire was secured by the UNTSO Chief of Staff on 17 March, and the matter was taken to the UN Security Council. A resolution was adopted on 9 April 1962. The resolution condemned the Israeli attack of 16-17 March, and determined that it was a breach of the 1949 General Armistice Agreement.<sup>231</sup> This particular incident did not escalate into further conflict, but it did nothing to improve on the already bad relationship between Israel and Syria. The peace on the Syrian frontier remained precarious. Israel secured military

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<sup>228</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Israeli Embassy officials and NEA officers. 20 March 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:535.

<sup>229</sup> US authorities eventually decided that the difference with Israel over Lake Tiberias sovereignty was not necessary to settle in order to approve of Israeli diversion plans. Thus the US de facto agreed that Lake Tiberias was under Israeli authority without actually specifying this in public. Memorandum of conversation between Israeli Embassy officials and NEA officers, 20 March 1962; Barbour to State, 26 March 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:545-546; Talbot to Rusk, 1 June 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:695; Talbot to Rusk, 7 June 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:715.

<sup>230</sup> According to ambassador Harman, a recoilless rifle was only fired on order from a military command. This, the ambassador explained, either implied that the Syrian government was ordering the shooting, or that anarchy was prevailing. In either case, this posed a different threat to Israeli security than unorganized, civil shooting would have done. Memorandum of conversation between Israeli Embassy officials and NEA officers. 20 March 1962:534-537.

<sup>231</sup> UN S/5111, res. 171, 9 April 1962.

victories in this and other clashes, and eventually the Syrian border was one of the most unstable leading up to the 1967 war.<sup>232</sup>

The problems over shared water resources continued to play an important role in the conflicts and tensions in the region. The Arab states still considered the Israeli diversion a threat. The Lebanese President Fuad Chehab even went so far as to suggest that this diversion constituted the largest threat to the peace in the Middle East.<sup>233</sup> However, the Arabs had yet to discover one of the important aspects of the threat posed by the Israeli diversion.

### ***Salting the Pill?***

One problem that gradually became more imminent was to ensure some sort of control of the increased salinity of the Jordan River. With several diversion projects taking place without consideration for each other, the salinity of the river was increasing dramatically. Pumping fresh water from upstream headwaters rendered the remaining, downstream water more salt than before. In addition, Lake Tiberias already had a higher salt level than other regional waters due to salt springs in the lake. Thus releasing water from Tiberias into the Jordan River would increase the salinity of the lower valley water source.<sup>234</sup>

The kingdom of Jordan was worst off, being the lower valley riparian. As a consequence of the Jordanian kingdom's own East Ghor project, the salinity of the river was already rising when a new controversy materialized. In the spring of 1963, the Israeli government decided to send salt springs from Lake Tiberias into the Jordan River, in an attempt to reduce the salinity of the lake. An alternative option which would have preserved the Jordan for irrigation by only periodically using the river for this purpose was rejected because it required cooperation between Israel and Jordan. When the US Embassy in Israel was informed about this, and that it would render the Jordan River unfit for irrigation in its lower valley, the American response was to desperately seek dissociation with what they anticipated would make the Israelis even more unpopular among its neighbours.<sup>235</sup>

The Americans tried to buy time. They advised the Israelis to delay further action until an American water expert had a chance to look things over. In 1963 Wayne Criddle left for the Middle East in secret. He had been the hydrology consultant to Eric Johnston during the negotiations in 1954-55, and he later worked as a consultant for the US State Department.<sup>236</sup> The purpose of Criddle's mission was to confirm for the US authorities that the Israelis as

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<sup>232</sup> Shlaim 2000:228; Lowi 1995:131-132.

<sup>233</sup> Beirut to State, 11 October 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 3817.

<sup>234</sup> Lowi 1995:89.

<sup>235</sup> Tel Aviv to State, 20 March 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 3961.

<sup>236</sup> Sosland 2007:44.

well as the Jordanians were sticking to the Johnston plan allocations.<sup>237</sup> In a report to the State Department, Criddle affirmed that both Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom were within the allocations given to them under the Johnston plan. He also found that it would be the Jordanian project that would first raise the salinity levels of the Jordan River to a dangerous level.<sup>238</sup>

Another of Criddle's discoveries was that the Hashemite Kingdom was not utilizing its full capacity. This was partly due to lack of cooperation with Israel, and partly due to a Jordanian underestimate of the amount of water the Hashemite Kingdom was entitled to in accordance with the Johnston plan. Israel, according to Criddle's report, was willing to release the water the Hashemite Kingdom was entitled to, and thus ensure an enhanced utility of the Jordan waters.<sup>239</sup> However, once again the US-Israeli disagreement regarding the Johnston plan became an issue. According to the Israeli view, the Johnston plan had envisioned that Israel would use the Jordan River for dumping its saline water. For the Americans this was problematic. They were not willing to support Israel's action, since it would provoke the Arab states once they found out. On the other hand, it was nearly impossible for the Americans not to support it if the Johnston plan did. As long as the US and Israeli interpretation of the plan did not coincide, however, the US did not have to make the difficult choice between the Johnston plan and Israeli pressure.<sup>240</sup>

Wayne Criddle also made some suggestions of how to further employ the Johnston plan allocations, again directed towards Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom. The United States hoped to use Criddle's expertise as an entry to establish cooperation between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom over shared water resources.<sup>241</sup>

Criddle developed a technical formula that specified the amount the Hashemite Kingdom and Israel would be allowed to withdraw from Lake Tiberias and the Yarmouk River, an amount in consistence with the Johnston plan. King Hussein was, however, under great pressure from the Arab political community, especially the Baath parties in Syria, Iraq and within his own kingdom, and from Egypt. An agreement between Israel and any Arab state was unacceptable for the other Arabs. Consequently, Hussein was pressured to refuse the proposed cooperation, despite the fact that this meant that the Hashemite Kingdom would not

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<sup>237</sup> Sosland 2007:71.

<sup>238</sup> Memorandum by Crawford, 20 September 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4002.

<sup>239</sup> Memorandum by Crawford, 20 September 1963.

<sup>240</sup> Memorandum by Kingsolving, 9 January 1964, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs, 1951-1976*, box 1; Memorandum by Crawford, 24 January 1964, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs 1951-1976*, box 1; Memorandum by Crawford, 3 March 1964, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs 1951-1976*, box 1.

<sup>241</sup> Sosland 2007:64, 72.

receive a sufficient amount of water.<sup>242</sup> The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan eventually rejected Wayne Criddle's proposals publicly, but King Hussein personally assured the Americans that Jordan intended to remain within the Johnston plan allocations. Criddle never found any reason to doubt that the Hashemite Kingdom indeed stayed true to this promise.<sup>243</sup>

### ***Taking a Stand: Lyndon B. Johnson and the Arab Summit***

On 22 November 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson took his place, and in the following period much of the communication back and forth to the Middle East consisted of condolences, reports of overseas grief for the late president, and assurances that US policy towards the region would not change significantly.<sup>244</sup>

The Arab states worried that Johnson, widely known to be an avid friend of Israel, would lead a more biased policy than his predecessor.<sup>245</sup> The concern in the Arab world was that the US government did not appreciate the full extent of the Arab feeling of threat from the Israeli water development activities. Thus, for the Arabs it became even more important to consolidate their suspicions about Israel into a unified front. There was considerable worry that if Israel were allowed to carry on its water development plans, this would greatly increase the potential for immigration to Israel. Considerable population growth in Israel was not at all beneficial for the Arab states surrounding Israel because they assumed this would make the Jewish state stronger.<sup>246</sup>

Israel, on the other hand, took the opportunity of the presidential change to again attempt a clarification of where the US and Israeli interpretation of the Johnston plan differed. One such point was whether or not the Israelis through the Johnston plan had accepted mutual observation of water projects, which the Israelis unyieldingly refused. To Rusk, this was unacceptable: "we regard Israel as committed to all repeat all of the Unified Plan [the Johnston plan], not just those parts from which it benefits and therefore likes."<sup>247</sup>

Towards the end of 1963, the US State Department feared that the Arab states might use the Israeli diversion of Jordan waters as an excuse to attack, either because the Arabs felt threatened or because they could not afford politically to lose face by not standing up to

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<sup>242</sup> Davies to Talbot, 21 October 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 3817.

<sup>243</sup> Davies to Talbot, 7 October 1964, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1854; Sosland 2007:72-73.

<sup>244</sup> Davies to Talbot, 24 November 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 3993; Palmer to State, 27 November 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 3947; Beirut to State, 3 December 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 3817; Memorandum by Talbot, 5 December 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4076.

<sup>245</sup> Cohen 1994:281-283; Spiegel 1985: 123-125.

<sup>246</sup> State to circular, 21 December 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 3817; Sosland 2007:79-80.

<sup>247</sup> Rusk to Tel Aviv, 4 January 1964, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1855.

Israel. The US Embassy in Cairo estimated that a political confrontation would be more likely than a military one, mostly because this would be most convenient for Egypt. To ensure that the Arab reaction would not be of a more violent character, however, it was crucial not to give the Arabs leaders any reason to jump the gun. Particularly important, the Americans believed, was to assure the Arab states that the US had no intention of using military means to protect the Israeli diversion. The Americans frantically tried to convince the Arabs that anything but a peaceful solution would be catastrophic for the region as a whole, and the Arab states in particular.<sup>248</sup>

Towards Israel, it was important to assure the Jewish state that the US government would strongly oppose Arab aggression in the event of an attack on the Israeli diversion project. On 23 and 24 January 1964, Israel's Ambassador to the US Avraham Harman had talks with Under Secretary W. Averell Harriman and Assistant Secretary Talbot regarding the US position towards the Jordan waters dispute. During these meetings, the Israeli ambassador was handed a note with some key US positions. These included that the US did not support a renegotiation of the Johnston plan, and a confirmation of the US support for Israeli diversions provided these were consistent with the original Johnston plan allocations. Despite the problems of employing an unsigned plan, the US authorities continued to stick to the Johnston plan.<sup>249</sup>

This and other water related issues were becoming so overwhelming that Rusk felt the need to clarify the official US position. Preferably, the US involvement would be as minimal as possible, but if asked the diplomats were given a set of policy points of which they might speak. These included the basic US support for the Johnston plan and those projects considered within its limits. One of the main points Rusk and State Department wanted to communicate was that according to US estimates, the Arab fear of an extensive growth in Israel's population was overrated. This was the case both because the diversion would not provide for the kind of numbers the Arabs feared, and because there were not that many potential Israeli immigrants left in the world. The US estimate was that even if the maximum number of potential immigrants settled in Israel, the Jewish state would be able to handle this with the level of resources and territory they already possessed.<sup>250</sup>

President Johnson did not make any groundbreaking changes in the policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict in the beginning of his presidency, but it would gradually become clear

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<sup>248</sup> Cairo to State, 9 November 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 3817; Memorandum by Davies, 31 December 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4075.

<sup>249</sup> State to Tel Aviv, 25 January 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, 18:26-28.

<sup>250</sup> Rusk to all diplomatic posts, 14 January 1964, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1855.

that his attitude towards the Middle East was different, or at least it was perceived as different, than that of his predecessor. Continuing as Secretary of State in Johnson's government, Dean Rusk also seemed ready for change. While he believed it would be necessary to maintain a balance in Middle Eastern relations, he nevertheless believed it was important for the US to show its support for Israel if the Arabs objected to what he perceived as important matters. The diversion of the Jordan waters was one of these important matters. Rusk believed it was high time that the US took a pro-Israel stand in the Jordan waters issue.<sup>251</sup>

Perhaps having his Secretary of State's advice in mind, President Johnson held a speech in the American division of the Jewish research institution, the Weizmann Institute of Science in New York on 6 February 1964. Here, he spoke about Israel's water problems, and his hopes that the US might cooperate with the Jewish state in future water development projects.<sup>252</sup> President Johnson's speech followed a similar speech by Deputy Under Secretary Alexis Johnson on 20 January. The subject and timing of these speeches aroused anger among many Arabs who were already provoked by the Israeli unilateral actions.<sup>253</sup> The Arabs believed that Israel's plans to divert water were "illegal and inimical to Arab interests."<sup>254</sup> Reports from King Hussein confirmed that the Arab perception of President Johnson's Weizmann speech had been that the US was supporting the Israeli claim of a right to divert water away from the Jordan River basin, which the Arabs considered illegal and detrimental to their interests.<sup>255</sup>

Almost coinciding with the speeches of the two Johnsons was an important event in the Middle East. In January 1964, the Arab League gathered in Cairo for the first ever Arab Summit. They convened mainly as a result of the Israeli diversion of the Jordan River, and the goal was to consider the Israeli threat, and to discuss potential Arab countermoves. In addition this, and several following summits, was intended to break the impasse that existed in Arab

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<sup>251</sup> Rusk to President Johnson, 16 January 1964, *FRUS 1964-68*, 18:17-23.

<sup>252</sup> Johnson, Lyndon B. "Remarks in New York City at the Dinner of the Weizmann Institute of Science", 6 February 1964, available through the American Presidency Project. The Weizmann Institute for Science is an Israeli research institution. The American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science offers "philanthropic support" for the Weizmann institute, through "advancing science for the benefit of humanity, and in strengthening Israel through science and technology." From the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute for Science website.

<sup>253</sup> Aleppo to State, 18 February 1964, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1855.

<sup>254</sup> Talbot to Harriman, 24 January 1964, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 2502.

<sup>255</sup> Sosland 2007:79.

cooperation as a result of the internal conflict that had been going on for years.<sup>256</sup> The Arabs feared that the Israeli diversion would reduce the Syrian and Jordanian water supplies considerably. As a result the preamble to the decisions of the summit had incorporated the first official, collective Arab declaration of “the final liquidation of Israel.”<sup>257</sup>

The Arab Summit also had a more specific outcome. Since none of the Arab states had accepted the Johnston plan, they had been standing without a guiding principle for the collective diversion of the Jordan waters, even if they in effect had stayed within the Johnston plan allocations. Whatever water development projects had been considered had been on a unilateral basis alone. Now, however, a collective Arab counter-plan was launched. It was decided that Syria and Lebanon would divert the headwaters of the Jordan River.<sup>258</sup>

### ***Revisiting the Revisited Johnston Plan?***

The problems of sticking to the Johnston plan no matter what were becoming obvious to those working in the State Department. Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs, Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (NEA/NE) Rodger P. Davies believed that for the Johnston plan to have any further meaning, it was time it entered a third phase following the initial Eric Johnston mission and then the more recent US attempts to bind the riparian states to the framework of the plan. This period had been plagued by difficulties such as the refusal of the Criddle proposals, the Israeli dumping of saline water in the Jordan, and the Arab Summits.<sup>259</sup>

The new phase Davies envisioned would not require a sharp break with the Johnston plan, but a shift in emphasis. Davies still believed that certain elements could be used as a “standard of judgment”.<sup>260</sup> In its entirety, however, the Johnston plan was not ideal. As an example Davies referred to the Israeli attempt to justify salt dumping and to seek US support for it with the Johnston plan in hand. This, and other attempts for the Jordan River riparian states to use the plan to force the US to support positions they did not actually support, was a problem with the continued usage of the plan as it was.<sup>261</sup>

In addition, Davies believed that the technical aspect of the Johnston plan, what the US had been clinging to once the refugee approach had proven difficult to pursue, was

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<sup>256</sup> Shlaim 2000:229; Elmusa, Sharif S. 1996:71. “The Land-Water Nexus in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3 (spring 1996). University of California Press on behalf of the Institute for Palestine Studies; Lowi 1995:121-122.

<sup>257</sup> The preamble to the summit is cited in Shlaim 2000:229-230.

<sup>258</sup> Shlaim 2000:230.

<sup>259</sup> Davies to Talbot, 7 October 1964, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1854.

<sup>260</sup> Davies to Talbot, 7 October 1964.

<sup>261</sup> Davies to Talbot, 7 October 1964.

gradually becoming outdated. As time passed, the technicians had become aware that many of the Johnston estimates of capacity were wrong. Further, the countries affected by the Johnston plan had developed in the almost ten years that had passed since the Johnston plan negotiations stranded. The Johnston plan allocations were calculated on the basis of potential agricultural use alone, but with an increased industrialization and urbanization of the Middle Eastern countries, their needs had changed accordingly. Thus the Johnston plan allocations were no longer valid.<sup>262</sup>

Davies also addressed the question of initiating a new approach to the Jordan waters problem. The situation had changed so that there was a “new set of checks and balances” where both the Arabs and the Israelis were forced to show more constraint than before. This would become a “real check on Israel’s taking off too much water”. Davies nevertheless expected difficulties for agreement on a level of details, and any new approach risked breaking down like the Johnston plan had. In order to avoid such a breakdown, Davies favoured that the US allowed certain diversions outside the Johnston plan allocations as long as they were reasonably equitable.<sup>263</sup>

Davies found that the Johnston plan continued to be the “best measure of a fair division of the Jordan’s waters”, but certain departures were inevitable. Further recommendations included that the US would not tolerate so-called “spite diversion”, meaning diversion that was not strictly necessary, but that would hurt other riparian states’ diversion possibilities. Davies advocated that the US should try to “divert” the water issues into international forums whenever possible. While the United States should continue to support both the Jordanian and Israeli projects, they should do so without trying to force further Johnston plan commitments, and without associating the US with controversial issues such as the Yarmouk summer diversion and Israeli saline dumping.<sup>264</sup>

Davies wanted continued US adherence to the Johnston plan, and he believed “some form of international supervision [of the Jordan waters division] remains an ideal we should not abandon.” However, he wanted to restrict the US usage of the plan to only those fields where it was strictly essential, and he warned against giving the Johnston plan and US involvement in Jordan waters issues an exaggerated status.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Davies to Talbot, 7 October 1964. Increased industrialization implies a reduction in the agricultural sector, which would require less water per country because of the decreased demand for irrigation.

<sup>263</sup> Davies to Talbot, 7 October 1964.

<sup>264</sup> Davies to Talbot, 7 October 1964.

<sup>265</sup> Davies to Talbot, 7 October 1964.

While the emphasis put on the Johnston plan indeed receded somewhat after this, it was not abandoned as such. The US State Department officials and Foreign Service officers continued to refer to it as a yardstick and as the best available alternative. But there appeared to be a wider acceptance for the possibility that alternative options and perhaps even US dissociation might become realistic with time. In an orientation to the US Embassy in Lebanon shortly after Davies' memo, for instance, it was ascertained that the US government would not insist on the Johnston plan's validity forever, but for the time being it remained the most realistic alternative to govern the Jordan waters problem. The fear of the US government was that without the Johnston plan chaos would reign as every riparian attempted to divert as much water as possible without any consideration for its neighbours.<sup>266</sup> However, even if several of them technically stuck to the plan, considerations for their neighbours did not appear to be the guiding principle for any of the Middle Eastern states involved in the Jordan waters dispute.

### ***New Wave of Hostilities***

The second summit convening the Arab League chiefs of state took place in September 1964. The atmosphere from the first summit had not changed – the Arab leaders confirmed their water diversion plan, and their joint efforts to eliminate Israel.<sup>267</sup>

In the spring of 1965, a new wave of violence as a result of the conflict over shared water resources shook the Middle East. This time the Americans worried about an Israeli attack rather than an Arab one. After the Arab summit the tables had turned. The Americans no longer expected the Arabs to attack Israel as a result of the threat posed by the Israeli diversion project. Israel too, seemed less worried about an Arab attack and more worried about the Arab diversion plans.<sup>268</sup> Instead, there was reason to expect that the Israelis were considering a pre-emptive strike. Talk of military action increasingly became a topic in Israel, even publicly and in official circles.<sup>269</sup> The Americans warned their Israeli contacts about countering the Arab diversion plans with military means. The Arab plan could not be seen as a justification for aggression, and the US government would “not condone or support the use of force in this matter.”<sup>270</sup>

The Israeli point of view was that the Arab plan would deprive them of significant amounts of water, and thus strike at “a vital Israeli national interest”. According to Levi

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<sup>266</sup> State to Beirut, 13 October 1964, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1854.

<sup>267</sup> Shlaim 2000:230.

<sup>268</sup> Davies to Talbot, 11 January 1965, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1888.

<sup>269</sup> Jernegan to Harriman, 9 February 1965, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1854.

<sup>270</sup> “Talking points”, attached to Jernegan to Harriman, 9 February 1965.

Eshkol, Israeli Prime Minister since Ben-Gurion's retirement in 1963, the Jordan River was "as dear to Israelis as the blood in their veins".<sup>271</sup> Further, the Israelis had no doubt that the Arabs would carry out their diversion plans, regardless of technical difficulties or cooperation problems. Hence the Israelis did not share the US view that the Arabs might be constructing unviable plans for political gain. Third, the Israeli view was that the Arabs simply could not "get away with it". The logical conclusion of this, from an Israeli point of view, was that Israel must have free hands in using force if they judged it to be necessary.<sup>272</sup>

A further reason Israel might want to use force in this matter, the American Embassy in Tel Aviv speculated, was an increased fear in Israel that their deterrent capacity was not as intimidating to the Arabs as it once had been. By striking down on the Arabs, Israel might reinstate this capacity. Seeing as the Americans specifically sought to avoid Israeli (or otherwise) use of force in the Middle East, this was another discrepancy between the Israelis and the Americans. What the Americans came to suspect, however, was that Israel might be bluffing. It seemed unlikely considering previous experience that the Israelis had not realized that the Americans, as well as the French and the British, would strongly discourage an attack. Trying to explain the Israeli action, the State Department officials wondered if Israel had a secret agenda. The best guess the Americans had was that Israel was either hoping to stimulate some kind of tripartite action, where the British and French would cooperate with the Americans to avoid Arab hostility; or that the Israelis were simply preparing their friends for an attack so that they, while disapproving, might not react as strongly.<sup>273</sup> The second option seems more plausible, both because it was doubtful whether the Israeli warnings and hints were as coherent and planned as such an option might suggest; and because the Israelis often did not want outside intervention in their affairs. Therefore it sounded a lot more realistic that the Israeli threat to attack was real enough (after all, they did attack a mere two years later), but that what they had learned from the 1956 war was not to keep their American friends in the dark.

The Americans also speculated whether the Israelis were looking for an opportunity to start a larger war. Syria, Jordan and Lebanon could all be targeted if Israel sought to use the water conflict as an excuse to go to war. Further, Israel might be able to get their worst

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<sup>271</sup> Memorandum from Tel Aviv, attached to Jernegan to Harriman, 9 February 1965.

<sup>272</sup> Memorandum from Tel Aviv, attached to Jernegan to Harriman, 9 February 1965.

<sup>273</sup> Memorandum from Tel Aviv, attached to Jernegan to Harriman, 9 February 1965.

enemy, Egypt, in the mix. “The temptation to strike at the U.A.R.’s forces in Sinai while they are depleted because of the Yemen campaign must be great.”<sup>274</sup>

The Americans were convinced, however, that the Arabs were bluffing about the intention of going through with their diversion schemes. Certain elements of the Arab diversion schemes were so obviously exposed to Israeli military attack or sabotage that it seemed unlikely that they were not merely attempts to provoke the Israelis. Such a provocation might put the Arabs in a victim position, which might be favourable politically. At the same time, several of the Arab projects were already started. Thus the speculations that they were not serious were questionable, and the Americans admitted they could not be accepted as irrefutable.<sup>275</sup> Regardless of whether the Arabs states or Israel or all of them were bluffing, there was still reason for concern in the US. Beliefs of a linkage between Arab nationalism and communism were flaring again, and the Americans feared the Arabs were moving closer to the Soviet Union than they had been in a decade.<sup>276</sup> The threat of a superpower war in the Middle East was as unappealing to the Americans as it had been a decade earlier.

The American position was disturbing to the Israeli government. The Israeli representative in Washington, Mordechai Gazit, approached the US State Department on several occasions, worrying about whether the US position to Israel was changing. Specifically, the Israelis wanted to make sure that the US commitment to the Johnston plan was as it had been. The US government, however, had by then developed a considerable ambivalence with regards to the Johnston plan. While still the best existing plan for water development in the Middle East, the Johnston plan was causing problems for the Americans. First of all, forcefully demanding the need for all the riparian states to keep in consideration a plan they had all rejected ten years earlier was not unproblematic, and it did not contribute to an improvement of relations with the Arab states. Secondly, certain aspects of the plan made it difficult for the Americans to make individual judgments in some of the more controversial water development plans.<sup>277</sup>

Secretary Rusk wanted to know the Israeli reaction to what they perceived as a change in the US policy. The US could not support the Israeli desire for *carte blanche* for pre-emptive strike, but if the US policy towards the Jordan waters question in general had

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<sup>274</sup> Memorandum from Tel Aviv, attached to Jernegan to Harriman, 9 February 1965.

<sup>275</sup> Memorandum from Tel Aviv, attached to Jernegan to Harriman, 9 February 1965.

<sup>276</sup> Telegram from the Department of State to several diplomatic stations, 19 March 1965, *CFPF 1964-66*, box 1888.

<sup>277</sup> Rusk to Tel Aviv, 2 March 1965, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1888.

changed, Rusk wanted to know what the Israelis thought.<sup>278</sup> In addition, a clarification was in order. If the US really was retreating from its commitments to Israel, this was a serious matter and definitely not a decision that could be made on a low level in the State Department. In a review of the commitments the US had given over several years in support of the Israeli water policy, Assistant Secretary Phillips Talbot ascertained that in effect the US was supporting Israel's projects. In his opinion this should continue, but he warned against unconditional US support for Israel in the Jordan waters question. It would be better to stick to the reservations already made. He also emphasized that it would be preferable to carry on with the diplomacy exercised on the Arab countries. Talbot underscored that this hardly had produced any miracles, but he believed it had had some effect. The American efforts, however, had not been helped by Israeli "saber-rattling".<sup>279</sup>

One potential way of diminishing the risk of armed conflict in the water dispute was to take the matter to the UN. This possibility was examined by the US State Department, but there were a number of reasons why this was not the most desirable solution. First of all, neither the Arabs nor the Israelis wanted a United Nations involvement in the dispute over Jordan waters. The most important reason on both sides seemed to be fear of not coming out of a potential UN handling as the victor. Secondly, the US expected that a Security Council resolution favouring Israel might trigger a Soviet veto. Regardless of this, a handling of the matter in the UN was far favourable to another war in the Middle East, especially considering that this might lead to a larger confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union. Therefore if the situation became more precarious, it should be addressed to the Security Council.<sup>280</sup>

On 22 April 1965 a meeting between Phillips Talbot and Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir took place in Jerusalem. Talbot was touring the Middle East, and visiting Israel after having been to several Arab countries first. His impression from his meetings with Arab leaders was that they were making "rather energetic efforts" of convincing him that the Arab water diversion projects did not exceed the Johnston plan.<sup>281</sup>

Meir dismissed this and instead indicated that she believed the Arab unity was withering. For instance she believed Lebanon's participation in the diversion project had been

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<sup>278</sup> Rusk to Tel Aviv, 2 March 1965.

<sup>279</sup> Talbot to Ball, 24 March 1965, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1854.

<sup>280</sup> Cleveland to Ball, 3 April 1965, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1853.

<sup>281</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 22 April 1965, attached to Tel Aviv to State, 4 May 1965, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1853.

the result of fear for other Arab states.<sup>282</sup> According to Talbot, Nasser had in his conversation with him been absolutely clear that he did not accept the Johnston plan. He remained firm in his claim that there was an Arab plan and that the Arabs intended to carry it out. Talbot's reply to this had been that the US assessment of the reasonableness of such a plan would be whether it was in accordance with the allocations made in the Johnston plan.<sup>283</sup>

Golda Meir, however, did not trust Nasser's intentions. According to her, the Egyptian President claimed that the water the Arabs planned to divert would not exceed the Johnston plan allocations, but if this was the case, "then it was a crime to waste so much money and manpower and to risk the peace in the area by engaging in the diversion." Meir believed this proved that the Arab diversion only made sense if what Nasser said in public, as opposed to what had been said to Talbot in secret, was the goal – that the real aim of the Arab water diversion was to cut off Israel's water sources. She refused to believe that Nasser could possibly think that Israel would stand idly by and watch this happen. Her judgment clearly was that the Arabs were trying to provoke Israel to attack. Meir seemed more than happy to respond to this in a forceful manner: She wanted to know when the US would allow Israel to "take a little action in order to prevent a bigger war later".<sup>284</sup>

Meir believed Lebanon was the key to solve the problem. However, she did not have any confidence in playing it nice. She believed that the US and the UK should stop reassuring Lebanon that they were warning Israel against the use of force. This way, she believed, Lebanon would worry Israel might attack, which would make it easier for the Lebanese to resist Egyptian pressure and oppose the Arab diversion project. Instead, "[i]t would be much better if the Lebanese were told Washington and London believed the Israelis would shoot if the diversion work were continued."<sup>285</sup>

In spite of her sabre rattling, Golda Meir stressed that Israel wanted a peaceful solution to the water issue. "The US should never mind what some people here said. Mrs. Meir supposed that Moshe Dayan was a bad boy, but she was confident that even he wanted a peaceful solution."<sup>286</sup>

Talbot did not appear to share Meir's enthusiasm for threatening Lebanon. On the contrary, he believed that it was risky to do so. Lebanese leaders were fearful for Israel's

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<sup>282</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 22 April 1965. The diversion project Meir is referring to is most likely the so-called "Arab plan", announced at the first Arab summit in Cairo and then confirmed in the second in Alexandria, both held in 1964.

<sup>283</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 22 April 1965.

<sup>284</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 22 April 1965.

<sup>285</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 22 April 1965.

<sup>286</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 22 April 1965.

threats, and the more imminent the danger of an Israeli attack seemed, the greater the risk for instability and division in Lebanon. This might lead to increased pressure from Arab nationalists, and increased chance of intervention by foreign Arab armies to protect Lebanon from Israel.<sup>287</sup>

Talbot conveyed to Meir that the Arabs feared Israeli expansion, both geographically and in population. Meir replied to this that “only the Herut Party talked about expansion and even they knew it was a lot of nonsense.”<sup>288</sup> To this, Meir added rather sarcastically: “The Arab fear of expansion made as much sense as would an Israeli demand that Egypt institute strict birth control.” Talbot tried to assure Meir that the Arab diversion would not affect Israel for a long time yet.<sup>289</sup>

Golda Meir indicated that the “point of no return” would be if the Lebanese “crossed the border”, meaning if they linked their diversion project up with the Syrian one. Under the Israeli interpretation of the Johnston plan, any cross-border cooperation of Jordan waters diversion was illegal. More importantly, perhaps, was the fact that a Syrian-Lebanese cooperation might have the possibility of exceeding the Johnston plan allocations. The Israelis would not tolerate this. From an Israeli point of view, the basic problem remained: “Israel could not allow the Arab diversion work to go on.” Again Meir emphasized that Israel wanted a peaceful solution. Even though Israel had been advised to take the matter to the UN, this was not an option Meir favoured because there was no guarantee that Israel would get its way with the UN.<sup>290</sup>

A third Arab summit was arranged in September 1965. Here the Secretary General of the Arab League announced that the Arab diversion work had ceased because of Israeli diversion. This caused a split among the Arabs. While the Syrian delegate wanted to continue opposing Israel on this matter, Egyptian President Nasser put his foot down. According to historian Avi Shlaim, this was a *de facto* admission that Israel had won the water war.<sup>291</sup>

### ***Still Water?***

The Americans continued to question the applicability of the Johnston plan. One of the main arguments the US had used with the Kingdom of Jordan was that the Johnston plan restrained

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<sup>287</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 22 April 1965.

<sup>288</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 22 April 1965. This statement is particularly interesting in hindsight, as it was only two years later that Israel attacked its neighbours and refused to give up on the ceded territory for years to come, some of which is still under occupation, more than 40 years later. The Herut party later merged into the Likud Party.

<sup>289</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 22 April 1965.

<sup>290</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 22 April 1965.

<sup>291</sup> Shlaim 2000:232.

Israel. However, this seemed to have lost its momentum. The Kingdom of Jordan would soon be unable to use the water in the lower Jordan and refused to take its allocation directly from the Israeli-controlled Lake Tiberias.<sup>292</sup> Consulting Wayne Criddle again, the Americans hoped to hear his assessment of the situation. Criddle argued that the US ought to stick to the Johnston plan. Not only did he think it still was relevant; he also believed that abandoning the plan at this time would “undermine the progress made thus far towards rational development of the river system”.<sup>293</sup>

This positive view of the Johnston plan was not shared by everyone. Dr. Mohammed Ahmed Salim, the Egyptian water expert who was the chief Arab negotiator during the Johnston negotiations, believed the Johnston plan was “dead”. He considered Eric Johnston’s failure to convince the Arabs that the Israelis would not take water out of the basin and divert it to the Negev the crucial point when the Johnston plan ceased to be of importance, regardless of the fact that it had been used by the Americans as a yardstick for a decade after this.<sup>294</sup>

Inside the US State Department the belief in the Johnston plan was also withering. So far it had rested on a decade-long claim that the plan had stranded on political issues after a virtual agreement on the technical issues. However, Oliver L. Troxel, Jr., who was one of the participants of the 1955 negotiations, interjected that the Johnston plan hardly could be employed in this way. According to Troxel, the Johnston plan allocations were intertwined to the extent that a change in one of them could affect all the others. Thus it was significant that agreement on all technical issues was not reached with all the participants. Even though it was also Troxel’s judgment that technical issues had ceased to be of consideration when the negotiations stalled, his point of view regarding the interdependence of the technical details fundamentally alters the notion of its applicability.<sup>295</sup> His conclusion was something that the State Department in the previous ten years perhaps had failed to realize the full extent of: “The Johnston Plan cannot be thought of as an agreement among the parties since *no agreement was reached*.”[my emphasis]<sup>296</sup>

While the Americans clearly did not want armed conflict over the shared water resources in the Jordan River basin, they did not make any convincing attempts to maintain the relative calm of the period, other than exercising diplomacy whenever confrontation

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<sup>292</sup> Beirut to State, 7 March 1966, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1853.

<sup>293</sup> Beirut to State, 7 March 1966, According to Criddle’s evaluation, the fact that none of the countries involved had gotten as much water as they wished only proved the fairness of the Johnston plan.

<sup>294</sup> Beirut to State, 29 March 1966, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1853.

<sup>295</sup> Troxel to Wehmeyer, 29 July 1966, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 1853.

<sup>296</sup> Troxel to Wehmeyer, 29 July 1966.

seemed likely. They certainly did not attempt to create comprehensive peace. The US proposals for a solution of the water dispute were all of a technical manner, and the main consideration was to keep any water development schemes in accordance with the outdated Johnston plan, simply because there existed nothing better. After the negotiations stalled in 1955, there were no further attempts to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict by use of water cooperation schemes, as had been done with the original Johnston plan.

The main problem with the usage and applicability of the Johnston plan ten years after it originally failed seemed to be that both its supporters and its opponents had fundamentally different ideas about what the plan involved, what it did not involve, and to what extent the Middle Eastern countries were to be held accountable for it. With such a loose framework the Johnston plan in reality could not function as a yardstick for prosperous use and division of water in the Jordan basin. Consequently, for the Americans to claim that it was must either be considered extremely naïve, or the Johnston plan became another one of the many initiatives within the Arab-Israeli conflict that stranded because the tough decisions that were required were not made.

To what extent could the Johnston plan have been said to have been a peace initiative post-1955? If including the word “comprehensive”, the answer is simple: not at all. After its initial negotiation rounds the Johnston plan did not take any other conflict areas into account, and thus it was only a plan attempting to divide the scarce water resources in the Jordan basin among the riparian states. In effect, the plan did function as “a goal, something to aim at”, seeing as both the Arab states and Israel made a point of showing the Americans that their diversion projects were within the limits of the Johnston plan. The Americans also used this deliberately as a diplomatic strategy to avoid confrontation. Having the plan as a yardstick, however inefficient, might have helped them to have something to go by when performing this diplomacy. However, in the long run the Johnston plan had little effect, both as a water sharing scheme, and as a peace initiative. The conflict between the Middle Eastern states resulted in another war, and the water conflict in the early 1960s was one of several issues that were integral to the conflict spiral that eventually triggered the 1967 war. The increased regional tension the water conflicts led to was part of what made the 1967 war inevitable.<sup>297</sup> Water was, however, only one reason for the increased conflict. The fact that the Americans, who had an interest of peace in the region, failed to link the water issue up to other conflict points, may have contributed to, rather than avoided war.

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<sup>297</sup> Lowi, Miriam R. 1995:115-118.

Despite this, the Middle Eastern states seemed less interested in the issue after 1965. There no longer were any Israeli delegations marching into meeting with State Department officials, demanding a clarification on the US position towards the Johnston plan. However, even if the “water wars” had calmed down sufficiently to no longer be of much concern to either Israel or the US government, incidents connected to the shared water resources in the Jordan Valley continued to a smaller degree between 1965 and 1967. Attacks and instability on Israel’s borders, especially towards Syria, but also along the Lebanese and Jordanian borders, persisted, several of which were directed at diversion equipment or water development sites.<sup>298</sup>

After the 1967 war, Israel gained new water resources through its occupation of the Golan Heights and the West Bank. The Jordan River headwaters, which had been the source of much of the conflict between the riparian states, now almost exclusively ran through Israeli-controlled territory. The geopolitical changes of the 1967 war thus had a profound effect on the water wars in the Middle East. For Israel’s part, the problem over shared water resources was now largely solved, since the resources were no longer shared.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Sosland 2007:86-88.

<sup>299</sup> Lowi 1995:143-144, 147.

## **The Palestinian Refugee Problem**

The Palestinian refugee problem has been on the Middle East agenda for all the US administrations since it originated as a result of the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948-1949. The refugee problem figured in reports and plans either as a separate issue or as a part of attempts and suggestions for larger settlements. For a number of reasons the refugee problem was never solved. Initially, the Eisenhower administration had hoped that the development of the Jordan waters under Eric Johnston's plan would open up new areas where the refugees could be settled.<sup>300</sup> When this did not happen, the following years were largely spent reviewing temporary arrangements without any major commitments to lasting solutions. The Kennedy administration launched a new initiative through the once-again-revamped Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC), where Special Representative Joseph E. Johnson embarked on several missions to the Middle East, trying to shift some ground in the difficult refugee question. Once this initiative failed, however, the remaining Kennedy period and the subsequent administration under Lyndon B. Johnson were characterized by feeble attempts at approaching the refugee problem and more enthusiastic ones in trying to pull out of any responsibility for the refugees and the Arab-Israeli conflict in general.

In what ways did the American government take part in the attempts of solving the Palestinian Refugee question between 1956 and 1967? Was the US patronage for The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and participation in PCC part of any comprehensive peace agreements?

### ***Resettlement versus repatriation***

Since the 1948 war, there were two main options considered for solution of the refugee problem: resettlement in the Arab countries surrounding Israel, or repatriation within the

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<sup>300</sup> At one point a scheme to facilitate refugee settlement in the Jordan Valley was a part of the Johnston Plan, but in the long run when the Americans ceased to consider the Johnston plan a peace effort and instead a "yardstick" for shared water resources, the settlement of refugees was no longer a part of the plan, as shown in the previous chapter of this thesis.

territories occupied by Israel.<sup>301</sup> In the United Nations General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, paragraph 11, it was established that the refugees who wished to return to their homes in former Palestine should be allowed to do so “at the earliest practicable date”, and if they chose not to return, they would receive compensation.<sup>302</sup> The problem was that the Arab and Israeli governments interpreted the UN resolution differently. The Israelis would only accept negotiations of the refugee problem as part of a larger settlement, while the Arabs refused to negotiate until the refugee problem was settled.<sup>303</sup>

US policy had from the beginning been that a compromise would be the only viable solution. If Israel agreed to allow a limited, yet significant number of refugees into their territory, the belief was that the Arab countries would be willing to resettle the bulk of the refugees. In turn the Americans hoped this would facilitate an overall solution of the other unresolved questions of the conflict. The main obstacle to this strategy was that the Americans failed to realize that Israel was not prepared to allow *any* refugees back – especially not before an overall settlement was in place.<sup>304</sup>

Barring the Israeli resistance to the idea of repatriation, however, there continued to be problems with the resettlement of the refugees in the mid-1950s. One of the recurring dilemmas with the refugee problem was finding a suitable host country for resettlement of the refugees that would not be allowed repatriation to Israel. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was logistically the easiest option because many of the refugees were already Jordanian citizens, but economically this was difficult since Jordan did not have the capacity to support the refugees. In Syria most of the refugees were already economically resettled, but the Americans did not consider this country for further negotiations about resettlement, most likely because of the strained political climate that existed between Syria and the West. In Lebanon there was already a potentially volatile situation between the Christian and Moslem population, and thus any suggestions to resettle the refugees there were subject to Lebanese criticism of upsetting the already fragile balance. And, according to a US estimate, Egypt would not be willing to facilitate water for the refugees in the Sinai Peninsula, and the Nile Valley was already too crowded to be considered. Thus it was logistically impossible to

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<sup>301</sup> For an account of the origin of the refugee problem and why it became such a challenge to solve in the coming years, see Morris, Benny. 2004. *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>302</sup> UN A/RES/194(III), § 11, 11 December 1948.

<sup>303</sup> Tiller, Stian Johansen and Hilde Henriksen Waage, 2010:8. “Powerful State, Powerless Mediator: The United States and the Peace Efforts of the Palestine Conciliation Commission”, unpublished article.

<sup>304</sup> Hahn 2004:101, 108-111, 248-249. It should, however, be noted that Israel already had allowed a symbolic number of refugees back to rejoin their families. Shlaim 2000:59.

resettle any significant number of refugees in Egypt. In addition, Egypt demanded that Israel accept repatriation before it was willing to consider resettlement for the refugees.<sup>305</sup>

Remaining was Iraq, which seemed like the most promising prospect, but here also there were problems. Iraq already had a significant portion of its population living under strained conditions. Further, the cultural and climate differences between Iraq and the areas the refugees came from were significant. Finally, like Egypt, Iraq demanded that before it was willing to accept negotiations about resettlement, Israel had to accept the principle of repatriation. Several suggestions that were made to the State Department therefore considered various approaches to win over the Iraqi government. Eric Johnston continued to encourage the Department to revive the Jordan water development program, and one of his suggestions was to link this with a proposal for resettling refugees in Iraq. Resettling refugees in Iraq was also at the core of an attempt of quiet diplomacy performed by Secretary General of the UN Dag Hammarskjöld. Finally Israel proposed that the US use its recently improved relationship with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to persuade Jordan to help convince Iraq to resettle refugees.<sup>306</sup>

### ***Refugees in the Cold War***

The primary US objective in the Middle East was “dislodging the Soviet Union from the foothold it is now in the process of acquiring and subsequently denying to it access to the area, while detaining the area resources, especially petroleum, for the West.”<sup>307</sup> Peacemaking was not on the agenda. The Cold War definitely was. Even if the Eisenhower administration did not want to take an active part in attempts at achieving comprehensive peace in the conflict, the refugee problem continued to be a matter demanding their attention, both because of the magnitude of the problem and because of its persistence.<sup>308</sup> The refugee problem was considered to be the main cause of tension between the Arab states and Israel. In addition, the US government had for years worried that the refugees might be susceptible to Soviet influence. There were thus concerns for the lack of solution of the refugee problem both in Congress and in the general public.<sup>309</sup> Thus the Eisenhower administration felt compelled to “facilitate” a solution despite its desire to limit US involvement in it. In June 1957 a progress

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<sup>305</sup> Rountree to Dulles, “First draft for Memorandum (progress report)”, 21/25 June 1957, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs, 1951-1976*, box 24; Hahn 2004:250.

<sup>306</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 21/25 June 1957.

<sup>307</sup> “Memo for the President, re: Near East Policy”, drafted by Wilkins, 21 November 1956, CDF 1955-1959, box 2546.

<sup>308</sup> Hahn 2004:249.

<sup>309</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 21/25 June 1957; Tiller 2009b:73.

report was drafted with the intent of exploring the options the Americans had with regards to the refugee question.

In this report two cycles of suggestions to the solution of the refugee problem were identified. First there had been attempts at solving the problem isolated from the rest of the conflict, through the establishment of UNRWA and the Johnston plan. The other cycle consisted of attempts at solving the refugee problem within the context of the general Arab-Israeli conflict, where the refugee problem was seen as one of the many obstacles to comprehensive peace. Secretary Dulles's speech on 26 August 1955, which was largely a public version of the Alpha plan, was an example of the latter. Due to the relative failure of any attempts to create comprehensive peace in the Middle East, however, the trend seemed to be returning to the first position – problem management tackling the refugee problem as a separate issue.<sup>310</sup> Comprehensive peace was no longer a priority.

### ***Reconsidering UNRWA***

Because there had been hope that the refugee problem might be solved as an integral part of the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, the Palestinian refugees were not made subject to any of the permanent UN refugee institutions. Instead, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was established in 1949 to supply the refugees with shelter, food, medical care and education. UNRWA started its work in the field in the Middle East on 1 May 1950.<sup>311</sup> UNRWA had relative success in terms of increasing the standard of living for the Palestinians, but it did not help solve the refugee problem. In addition, UNRWA was created as a temporary arrangement until the difficult refugee problem could be resolved. Since Israel and the Arab states continued to disagree on this matter, and external actors such as the United States remained unable to negotiate a compromise, UNRWA gradually became a de facto permanent institution.<sup>312</sup>

UNRWA was becoming a headache for the US government in the late 1950s. The initial mandate consisted of two tasks: first, UNRWA should carry out relief and works programmes in cooperation with local governments; secondly, the organization should cooperate with the Middle Eastern governments to prepare them for the termination of international support for the refugees.<sup>313</sup> The intention was that UNRWA would serve as a

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<sup>310</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 21/25 June 1957.

<sup>311</sup> Hahn 2004:101, 249; UNRWA, About UNRWA, "Overview", available at the UNRWA website.

<sup>312</sup> UNRWA, "Overview"

<sup>313</sup> UN A/RES 302 (IV), 8 December 1949.

transitional agency. Since the refugee problem remained unsolved, however, the UNRWA mandate was repeatedly renewed.<sup>314</sup>

The US government was quite satisfied with UNRWA's performance. The organization was efficient; the medical and educational programs had been successful; and despite the fact that the US was decidedly the largest contributor, UNRWA had served its purpose as a means of insulating the US from "the difficult consequences which would ensue if we were directly involved in a relief program."<sup>315</sup> In other words, UNRWA had been a successful political decoy for the United States.

Nevertheless, the Americans feared that UNRWA had outplayed its role. First of all, there was concern that the "temporary" institution was becoming permanent. UNRWA had not been able to carry out any significant resettlement projects, and without any realistic prospects of this happening soon, chances were that the need for a financial support system like UNRWA would never end. Secondly, many of the Palestinians who had left the refugee camps, and thus actually had been resettled in Arab states, continued to receive UNRWA aid. On top of the natural growth in the refugee population, this meant that the relief agency's continuous need for funding increased.<sup>316</sup> Third, the Americans feared that by letting UNRWA handle the refugees the local governments might become "insulated" from the seriousness of the situation. This, the Americans speculated, might imply that the Arab governments stalled the decision of resettling the refugees.<sup>317</sup>

Taking the above into account made the US contribution of 70 per cent of UNRWA's funds seem like an increasingly difficult endeavour. Congress was already sceptical towards granting the vast sum of money the US spent on UNRWA, and the prospect of a steadily and permanently increasing budget made a continued US commitment of this scale unlikely. In addition the other contributing states were also finding it gradually more difficult to contribute.<sup>318</sup>

The logical outcome of weighing the cost against the benefits seemed to be that UNRWA could not continue in its original form. The agency's mandate was set to expire on 30 June 1960, and the State Department's preference was to terminate the relief agency by not renewing the mandate when it was renegotiated. Until this expiration, however, it was decided

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<sup>314</sup> UNRWA, "Overview". The UNRWA mandate is still renewed periodically. The current mandate is set to expire on 30 June 2011.

<sup>315</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 21/25 June 1957.

<sup>316</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 21/25 June 1957. Between 1955 and 1960, the number of refugees registered with UNRWA increased from 905,986 to 1,120,889. UNRWA, "Statistics: Number of registered refugees (1950-2008)", available at the UNRWA website.

<sup>317</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 21/25 June 1957.

<sup>318</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 21/25 June 1957.

to keep the US funding, as promised, at 70 per cent. The fact that the termination of UNRWA would not also mean a termination of the refugee problem was seen as unfortunate, but hopefully something that could be resolved by a transfer of certain *ad hoc* funding mechanisms to the local Arab governments.<sup>319</sup> Due to the American belief that the organizational structure of UNRWA was making Arab cooperation difficult, they considered reorganizing UNRWA to a local-based institution where the Arab governments would be more involved.<sup>320</sup>

In addition to the idea of transferring UNRWA's relief duties to the local Arab governments by the time UNRWA's mandate expired, there were proposals that called for Israeli cooperation in accepting the principle of repatriation. In reality, however, the number of refugees Israel was supposed to repatriate was set at an upper limit of 100 000.<sup>321</sup> This was the same amount of refugees Israel had indicated it would be willing to repatriate late in the negotiations in 1949.<sup>322</sup> The offer had been "too little, too late" then, and after almost a decade in which the total number of refugees had continued to grow, it was unlikely that the Arabs would be any more willing to accept that same amount.<sup>323</sup>

The US State Department still favoured the termination of the UNRWA mandate as renegotiation was drawing nearer. The Americans feared that while UNRWA had ensured a better situation for the refugees, it had also contributed to a protraction of the refugee problem. As long as UNRWA was interposed between the refugees and the local governments, the Middle Eastern states could claim that the refugees were a UN responsibility. This way they had no incentive to solve the problem, and thus were not prepared to cooperate with UNRWA or other actors to ensure a solution of the refugee problem.<sup>324</sup>

Because the Americans believed UNRWA obstructed a solution of the refugee problem, they deduced that the termination of UNRWA's mandate might speed up the process for a solution of the refugee problem. However, this led to considerable international concern

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<sup>319</sup> Rountree to Dulles, 21/25 June 1957.

<sup>320</sup> Memo for the President, drafted by Wilkins, 21 November 1956, attachment. In 1956 this proposal was abandoned because of "timing", most likely referring to the tense situation between Israel and the Arab states so soon after the 1956 war.

<sup>321</sup> Hahn 2004:249-250; Rountree to Dulles, 21/25 June 1957.

<sup>322</sup> In hindsight it seems evident that the Israeli offer was a political maneuver rather than something they actually intended to implement, as the Israelis knew both the US and the Arab states would consider this offer too low. Tiller and Waage 2010:24.

<sup>323</sup> Benny Morris characterized the Israeli offer of 1949 as "too little, too late". Morris 2004:580.

<sup>324</sup> Draft paper by Bergus "The US and the Arab-Israel Problem", 24 February 1958, *Records Relating to the Near East Arms Initiative*, box 1.

about what would happen with the refugees until a solution could be reached, or if none was reached at all.<sup>325</sup>

The UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld, was sceptical towards an abolition of UNRWA. Considering the low standard of living in many of the Arab countries, both the refugees and the local population of the Arab world would suffer considerably if the financial support were to end. He feared that this might send the Arabs into armed upheaval. Hammarskjöld's recommendation was an infinite continuation of UNRWA's mandate.<sup>326</sup> The Secretary General personally told President Eisenhower that he preferred a permanent solution to the refugee problem, but that he believed UNRWA should remain in its current form until the refugees were satisfyingly integrated. The American view remained that they did not consider UNRWA's indefinite existence beneficial to anyone – especially the United States – but that they would be willing to assist the Arab states if they would carry some of the weight themselves.<sup>327</sup>

The director of UNRWA, Dr. John H. Davis, also discussed his concern with State Department officials. In reply to State Department's worries about convincing the US Congress of further financing UNRWA, Dr. Davis supplied the Department with the argument that Congressional funding of UNRWA really was about funding Middle Eastern stability.<sup>328</sup> The Lebanese ambassador to the US appealed directly to the American UN delegation and the Secretary of State, in hope of securing their support for the continued existence of UNRWA, and representatives from several other Arab states also contacted the US delegates with the same concern.<sup>329</sup>

After the discussion with the UN Secretary General, the UNRWA director and the Arab representatives, the US was willing to reassure those who worried that the US agreed that international assistance to the Palestinian refugees would have to continue after June 1960. Gradually it became clear that it was probable that UNRWA's mandate would be renewed. The Americans gradually managed to move towards a compromise, however. The draft resolution eventually supported by the Americans renewed UNRWA, but for a limited

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<sup>325</sup> Hahn 2004:249.

<sup>326</sup> Hahn 2004:251; Memorandum of conversation between Secretary Herter and Hammarskjöld, drafted by Walmsley, 23 April 1959, *FRUS 1958-1960*, 13:170; Dillon to Hammarskjöld, 21 May 1959, *FRUS 1958-1960*, 13:174-175.

<sup>327</sup> Briefing Memorandum for the president regarding meeting with Hammarskjöld and Ambassador Lodge, 21 May 1959, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 1246.

<sup>328</sup> Memorandum drafted by Palmer, 25 August 1959, *FRUS 1958-1960*, 13:192.

<sup>329</sup> Memorandum drafted by Palmer, 26 October 1959, *FRUS 1958-1960*, 13:212-214; Lodge to State Department, 5 November 1959, *FRUS 1958-1960*, 13:215.

time.<sup>330</sup> The Americans accepted this, but remained worried that Congress might cut off the economic supply.<sup>331</sup>

International pressure made it apparent to US officials that it was no longer in their best interest to keep insisting on a termination of UNRWA. The mandate was renewed for three years in the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1959. The vote was unanimous, apart from Israel which abstained. The same resolution called upon the PCC to “secure the implementation” of paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194, which in effect was a reminder to the PCC of its mandate to seek a permanent solution to the Palestine refugee problem and a confirmation of the UN’s interest in doing so.<sup>332</sup>

### ***Eisenhower’s Lack of Faith***

After the failure of the 1949 Lausanne conference the Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC) was considered *de facto* dead by many. The PCC suffered a gradual demise, and for the majority of the 1950s and 1960s, the PCC largely was dormant in its primary task as UN negotiator in the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>333</sup> The PCC had been instructed to “take steps to assist the [Israeli and Arab] Governments and authorities concerned to achieve a final settlement of all questions outstanding between them.”<sup>334</sup> Between 1952 and 1960, the PCC’s work consisted of mapping out refugee properties in Israel in an attempt of determining the level of compensation Israel owed, and of reopening frozen Arab bank accounts. The pretext was that if the PCC could shift some ground in the non-political part of the conflict, then hopefully this might lead to progress in other aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict as well. While there can be no doubt that the work done on the refugee properties and bank accounts was important for those who got some of their property back, it did not have the desired domino effect, and it

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<sup>330</sup> Lodge to State Department, 5 November 1959, *FRUS 1958-1960*, 13:215; Memorandum drafted by Brewer, 10 November 1959, *FRUS 1958-1960*, 13:217; Herter to US UN delegation, 25 November 1959, *FRUS 1958-1960*, 13:237.

<sup>331</sup> Congressional reluctance to the funding of UNRWA continued to be a problem for the US government. Despite its misgivings, however, Congress must have continued to provide the necessary funds on a yearly basis. The US contribution amounted to roughly 70 per cent of the total government funding of UNRWA until 1966, after which it gradually dropped. However, this is a result of increased funding from other governments rather than a drastic decrease in US spending, since the yearly amount of dollars the US government spent on the UNRWA between 1958 and 1967 always remained somewhere between 22 and 25 million dollars. Scholz, Norbert. 1994. “US Contributions to UNRWA”, Appendix X. *U.S. Official Statements: The Palestinian Refugees*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies.

<sup>332</sup> Hahn 2004:251; UN A/RES/1456 (XIV), 9 December 1959; UN A/RES/194 (III), 11 December 1948.

<sup>333</sup> Forsythe, David P. 1972:104-105. *United Nations Peacemaking: The Conciliation Commission for Palestine*. Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press; Hahn 2004:89.

<sup>334</sup> UN A/RES/194 (III), §6, 11 December 1948.

did not improve the situation for the majority of the refugees.<sup>335</sup> There can be little doubt that the PCC had lost much of its importance.

Despite its own prominent membership, the US government believed the PCC had outplayed its role. The verdict was clear:

The United States would press at a reasonably early date (depending on current developments and reactions of other member states) for adoption of the resolution which it tabled at the Emergency General Assembly Session which called for the establishment of a negotiating committee to replace the moribund and ineffective Palestine Conciliation Commission.<sup>336</sup>

The PCC was considered ineffective and outdated. Despite this, State Department officials often referred to the PCC as one of the many peace initiatives the US continued to contribute to in their external correspondence.<sup>337</sup> The PCC was convenient to refer to whenever accusations were raised that the US was not doing enough in the Middle East, but for all intents and purposes, the US desperately wanted to get out.

The Eisenhower administration signed off without much hope for progress in the Middle East. It was believed that there was little the Americans could do so late in a presidential period, especially with the Middle Eastern states shying away from any commitments. Israel, it was believed, favoured status quo over a solution – at least any solution the situation allowed it to hope for. The Americans assumed the Israelis were awaiting the US presidential election in hope that a US administration more favourable to Israel would come to power. In the meantime, the Americans could only observe that “Israel [...] constantly proclaims its desire for ‘peace’, a process which it envisages as the forced appearance of the Arabs at a conference table.” The Americans did not believe that the Israelis thought this was a realistic position, but they thought that the Jewish state continued this policy because it made for a good public display of cooperativeness.<sup>338</sup>

The Eisenhower administration, constantly aware and afraid of the Soviet presence in the region, also estimated that the Soviet Union wanted status quo. A settlement of the conflict would only serve to reduce the Arab support for the Soviet Union, as they would no longer have such an acute need for arms, the Americans assessed. There were several of the leaders of what the Americans considered friendly Arab states who had come to the US with hopes of a Palestine settlement. In the current climate of intra-Arab conflicts and Israeli lack

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<sup>335</sup> Forsythe 1972:104-106.

<sup>336</sup> “An Outline of Short-Term and Long-Term United States Plans in the Middle East”, Memorandum for the President, 21 November 1956, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2548.

<sup>337</sup> This happened repeatedly in the period. One example can be found in Dorman to Runyan, 13 June 1958, *CDF 1955-1959*, box 2551.

<sup>338</sup> Draft paper by Bergus, 24 February 1958.

of will to compromise, however, the Eisenhower administration did not think the time was right for such an effort. In order to achieve a solution of the Palestine refugee problem, the US government believed “a declaration of honest willingness on the part of Israel to repatriate a substantial number of refugees” must be the first step. In other words, not much had changed since 1949. The Americans believed that an Israeli concession might be achievable, but the timing was essential. In early 1958, the timing was not the best.<sup>339</sup>

In light of this, there was nothing that could convince Eisenhower that the time was right to initiate any further efforts for a resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem. The overall conclusion was that any US approach to the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict or any significant aspect of it, such as the refugee problem, would fail. The Americans feared that a misguided approach at the wrong time might risk US interests in the area, and endanger the relative calm following the 1956 war.<sup>340</sup> In the end, Eisenhower’s solution was to try to disengage from the Arab-Israeli conflict altogether.

### ***Kennedy’s New Approach***

When John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, the US Middle East policy was one of many areas where he wanted to leave a trace. As a way of introducing the new president and his visions for US presence in the Middle East, Kennedy sent personalized letters to each of the Arab heads of state a few months after his inauguration. His main message was that of friendship and cooperation, and he specifically addressed his interest in resolving difficult issues such as the Jordan water development and the Palestine refugee problem.<sup>341</sup> The purpose of the letters was to underscore the balanced and unbiased policy Kennedy wished to approach the Middle East with. A new, quiet-diplomacy approach through the PCC was in the making, and it was fundamental for its success to secure a certain level of Arab support.<sup>342</sup>

These letters, and later a conversation with Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, were the starting point for a new initiative that the Kennedy administration hoped could help shift some ground in the refugee question. Kennedy’s motivation was not just to fulfil election campaign promises. There was also hope that a break-through in the refugee question could dissolve the deadlock in the rest of the conflict. As a fortunate side effect, any progress in the Middle East would mean a smaller risk of extremists gaining ground in the region. Further, the Americans still hoped progress regarding the refugee problem would make it possible to

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<sup>339</sup> Draft paper by Bergus, 24 February 1958.

<sup>340</sup> Draft paper by Bergus, 24 February 1958.

<sup>341</sup> Kennedy to Nasser, 11 May 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:110-113. The other letters were identical except for one individual paragraph per country. Bowles to Kennedy, 6 May 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:100-101.

<sup>342</sup> Bowles to Kennedy, 6 May 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:100-101.

end the US's considerable contribution to UNRWA, and with this it was plausible that a gradual US disengagement from the financial aspect of the conflict was within reach.<sup>343</sup>

The US administration continued to try to convince the Israelis that a symbolic gesture, such as Israeli acceptance of a repatriation of a small number of refugees, might be enough to shift the psychological barrier that hindered Arab willingness to resettle the majority of the refugees. However, this was not an option for Israel. The persistent Israeli position was that the refugee question could only be handled under a broader peace settlement – or that it would solve itself if a peace settlement was in place. Israel's foreign minister Golda Meir felt that the Israeli willingness to negotiate an overall peace agreement was a sufficient show of goodwill. Meir refused to agree with the US theory that a symbolic Israeli gesture might encourage the Arabs to cooperate.<sup>344</sup> Since the Arabs continued to oppose direct negotiations with Israel, this effectively put the refugee question in limbo as well.

Even though the positions seemed uncompromising, the Kennedy administration decided to try a cautious approach of quiet diplomacy. Due to the UN reconfirmation of the PCC mandate to negotiate a settlement between the Israelis and Arabs, the PCC seemed like the right medium through which to launch a refugee initiative.

### ***The Johnson Missions***

On 21 August 1961, Dr. Joseph E. Johnson, President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, was appointed by the PCC as a Special Representative to the Middle East to “undertake an exploratory mission to the Middle East on the refugee problem”.<sup>345</sup> Johnson was not formally associated with the US government, but he cooperated closely with the State Department in his work for PCC, and it was through the suggestion by the State Department that Johnson was chosen, after PCC had initially sought a “neutral” special representative.<sup>346</sup>

The new mission already encountered problems at the planning stage. When President Kennedy introduced the idea of a PCC Special Representative to Israeli Prime Minister David

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<sup>343</sup> Working paper no 3, Airlie House discussions, “The Palestine Refugee Problem: Repatriation and Resettlement”, 1 June 1964, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs, 1951-1976*, box 20.

<sup>344</sup> Barbour to Rusk, 12 July 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:185-187.

<sup>345</sup> Rusk to Kennedy, 26 November 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:346-348. Johnson's position with the Carnegie Endowment, a private, nonprofit organization and eventually “think tank”, did not directly have anything to do with his work as a PCC special representative.

<sup>346</sup> The former UN High Commissioner for Refugees (1956-60), Auguste Lindt from Switzerland, was briefly considered for the position as Special Representative, but he turned the offer down to become Switzerland's ambassador in Washington. Since there was no time to find another “neutral” representative, it was decided by the US State Department to approach Johnson, who had previously been associated with the Department. Meyer to Rusk, 9 August 1961, telegram cited in Document no. 96 (Editorial Note), *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:221; Handwritten note attached to Stevenson to State, 2 June 1961, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs, 1951-1976*, box 24.

Ben-Gurion, the Prime Minister was not overly optimistic with regards to any resolution of the refugee question. To Kennedy he blamed “the UAR and any Arabs”, claiming that they considered the refugees their “best weapon”.<sup>347</sup> Ben-Gurion was hesitant to discuss the PCC initiative at all, but he reluctantly agreed that “it is always worth trying”.<sup>348</sup>

The Americans interpreted Ben-Gurion’s apprehensive admission as a green light. However, when the US permanent delegate to the UN, Adlai Stevenson, approached Ben-Gurion a few days later with more information about the upcoming PCC initiative, it became apparent that Ben-Gurion was not on board. The Prime Minister flat-out rejected Stevenson’s suggestion that Israel would have to accept some repatriation. He accused Stevenson of proposing a completely different scenario than what the President had mentioned.<sup>349</sup>

The Americans were in disarray. In the State Department they discussed whether Ben-Gurion’s change of heart had anything to do with him feeling cornered by Stevenson. Some suggested that more pressure should be put to bear upon Israel, while others argued that enough damage had been done and that applying more pressure on Israel would only make the Jewish state more hesitant to cooperate.<sup>350</sup> The only thing the Americans did not appear to consider was that Ben-Gurion was not all that enthusiastic about the proposal in the first place, and that his acceptance in the meeting with Kennedy had only been an agreement that a solution to the refugee problem would be favourable. Ben-Gurion never said anything about *what* he thought the solution should be.

Despite the initial problems, Johnson left for the Middle East on 31 August 1961. He visited Beirut, Amman, Cairo, Gaza, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, conducting high-level discussions in each city.<sup>351</sup> Johnson’s meetings in the Middle East were characterized with mutual cordiality and respect as a rule, but it was not easy to get any realistic ideas on the table. The Lebanese representatives wanted to accept resettlement only within the borders of former Palestine. The discussion with David Ben-Gurion was so rough that Johnson considered walking out.<sup>352</sup> Ben-Gurion also symbolically chose the opportunity of Johnson’s

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<sup>347</sup> Conversation between Kennedy and Ben-Gurion, Memorandum by Talbot, 30 May 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:139-140.

<sup>348</sup> Conversation between Kennedy and Ben-Gurion, 30 May 1961:140.

<sup>349</sup> Stevenson to Rusk, 2 June 1961, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs*, box 24.

<sup>350</sup> Handwritten note (13 June 1961) and typed notes (5 June 1961; undated) attached to a telegram from Stevenson to State Department, 2 June 1961, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs, 1951-1976*, box 24.

<sup>351</sup> “Nineteenth progress report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine [PCC]”, 13 October 1961, General Assembly, 16<sup>th</sup> session, A/4921.

<sup>352</sup> Memorandum by Crawford, 29 September 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:265-266.

visit to clarify his position in the Knesset. His speech, and a subsequent Knesset resolution, underscored that Israel was not prepared to accept any Palestinian refugees.<sup>353</sup>

Johnson's conclusions after his first visit to the Middle East were not optimistic:

It is clear that as matters now stand there is no prospect of an early resolution of the Palestine question as a whole and, as can be seen from the preceding section, there are many indications that no progress can be made on the Palestine Arab refugee question apart from, or in advance of, an over-all settlement.<sup>354</sup>

However, Johnson's observation also included that while he had encountered the same uncompromising attitudes from the Arab and Israeli leaders as had stranded the refugee problem in the first place, he had reason to believe there was willingness in both the Arab and Israeli capitals for a step-by-step solution. He believed it would be beneficial to continue with a Special Representative approach for at least another year to further explore these possibilities. He also stressed that even with a solution in sight, the Palestinian refugees would continue to depend on international economic assistance for at least a decade. In tune with Johnson's recommendations, the US United Nations delegation subsequently supported a continued PCC mission and a renewal of the UNRWA mandate.<sup>355</sup>

Johnson presented his draft report to the Israeli and Arab delegations at the UN on 15 November 1961. The Arab states especially received it unfavourably – not, as one might expect, because of its conclusions, but because of the historical section which the Arabs considered biased towards Israel. After consideration, Johnson agreed to alter the report by removing a significant portion of the historical part. However, by doing so he ran into trouble with the Israelis who claimed Johnson was making alterations without their consent. The other PCC members, France and Turkey, supported Israel's claim that the report should be altered back, but Johnson refused. It helped very little that US representatives pointed out that the changes made did not alter the conclusions of the report. Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir was particularly annoyed with the alterations. Thus, the Johnson mission had suffered another serious blow.<sup>356</sup>

When the refugee question was up again for debate in the General Assembly, there was considerable apprehension in the US State Department. It was expected that both the Arabs and the Israelis would make symbolic proposals that would be unacceptable to the other party, and thus the United States expected few if any results from the debate.<sup>357</sup> As

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<sup>353</sup> Forsythe 1972:127

<sup>354</sup> "Report by the Special Representative", Joseph E. Johnson to UN, attached to "Nineteenth progress report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine [PCC]", 13 October 1961.

<sup>355</sup> Rusk to Kennedy, 26 November 1961; Memorandum by Crawford, 29 September 1961:264.

<sup>356</sup> Editorial note, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:329-330; Forsythe 1972:128.

<sup>357</sup> Rusk to Kennedy, 26 November 1961:346.

predicted, Arabs and Israelis alike proposed resolutions the US quickly dismissed as extremes. The only real development in the UN debate on the refugee question, then, was that the General Assembly endorsed the PCC and Johnson's work, regardless of the unenthusiastic reception Johnson's report had received with the Middle Eastern states.<sup>358</sup> Thus it was decided that the mission should go on.

Johnson left for another trip to the Middle East in April 1962. This time the political climate in the region was not as favourable as it had been the previous autumn. There was a crisis between Israel and Syria in March 1962, and the Arab countries were going through a period of intensified intra-Arab rivalries.<sup>359</sup> Johnson's meetings, too, were more difficult this time around. In Tel Aviv the Israelis attempted to discuss specific numbers for how many refugees they would be expected to repatriate. Because a fixed number would threaten Johnson's attempt at keeping the negotiations relatively informal, the discussions in Israel subsequently stranded at the frequent Israeli fear that allowing any refugees to return might threaten Israeli security. In Amman, the Jordanian government had their own set of fears: that Israeli aggression threatened the Hashemite Kingdom's security; and perhaps more importantly, that a large amount of the refugees who would not be allowed or who would not choose to return to Israel under the Johnson plan would have to be resettled in Jordan.<sup>360</sup>

Under these difficult circumstances, Johnson's task seemed impossible. As an alternative to giving up completely, however, it was decided not to continue with negotiations, but instead formulate a plan in which the Israelis and Arabs could make comments.<sup>361</sup>

The plan that was presented to the Middle Eastern states in the autumn of 1962 suggested a combination of repatriation and resettlement, determined by the individual refugee's wishes identified in several interview rounds. The interviews would include disincentives for returning to Israel to encourage as many as possibly to choose the politically simpler option of resettlement. By this technique, it was assumed that only about 1 out of every 10 Palestinians would want to return to Israel. Those remaining would be resettled in Arab states or elsewhere. The Johnson plan estimated that the settlement of all the registered refugees would take five to ten years, and the cost would be divided, with the majority (40 per cent) to be covered by Israel, 30 per cent by the United States and the remaining 30 per cent

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<sup>358</sup> Summitt 2008:90; UN A/RES/1725, 20 December 1961.

<sup>359</sup> Forsythe 1972:130. An account of the Syro-Israeli crisis can be found in Chapter Four of this thesis.

<sup>360</sup> Forsythe 1972:130-131; Scott to State, 18 April 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:635-636.

<sup>361</sup> Forsythe 1972:133.

by other nations and private sources.<sup>362</sup> Another key element Johnson hoped might lead to success was that the Israelis and Arabs did not have to formally agree to the plan as long as they did not specifically reject it. It was not going to be promoted as another signed document that could cause embarrassment in both Israel and the Arab states, but rather a settlement by acquiescence.<sup>363</sup>

The Americans were aware that achieving such acquiescence would not be easy. Firstly, the Arab states were sceptical, both collectively and due to individual concerns. For instance, Lebanon worried that it would be forced to resettle a large number of refugees that might disturb the already fragile balance between the Christian and Moslem population.<sup>364</sup>

Secondly, it was becoming clear that Israel did not want any repatriation:

Fundamentally, Israel wants no repatriation of refugees and can be expected to try to build resistance among its supporters in this country to any plan involving anything but token repatriation.<sup>365</sup>

Regardless, this did not change the belief that Israel could be persuaded to accept a limited number of refugees under the right terms.<sup>366</sup> As it turned out, Israel never had any intentions to accept any repatriation. It was not possible to find the right terms.

### ***Trying to Strike a Deal***

Not willing to accept defeat, the US decided to try to use its own influence with the Israelis. In August 1962 Kennedy made a decision to sell Hawk missiles to Israel. This was a request the Israelis had already put in early that spring, but the US Departments of State and Defense had been debating back and forth whether such a sale was a good idea. Kennedy, like his predecessor Eisenhower, had previously denied arms requests from Israel in accordance with the outspoken US strategy of limiting a Middle East arms race. Now, however, the option of linking the sale of the Hawk missiles to the Johnson plan seemed promising. In utmost secret Kennedy dispatched his Deputy Special Counsel, Myer Feldman, to visit Tel Aviv to convince Ben-Gurion to accept the Johnson plan with the understanding that this would be the precondition for US sale of arms to the Jewish state.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Rusk to Kennedy, 7 August 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18:33-47.

<sup>363</sup> Brubeck to Bundy, 9 August 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18:48.

<sup>364</sup> Rusk to Kennedy, 7 August 1962:38.

<sup>365</sup> Rusk to Kennedy, 7 August 1962:37.

<sup>366</sup> In a memorandum for the President, Secretary Rusk estimated that Israel probably would be willing to accept 100-150 000 refugees if the remainder were resettled by cooperating Arab states, if the Israeli government was given the ultimate decision power over the number of refugees to repatriate, and if the United States stepped up and contributed with the financial aspect. Rusk also believed that it might be necessary for the US to meet some of Israel's long-term goal, such as a US security guarantee. Rusk to Kennedy, 7 August 1962:37.

<sup>367</sup> Summit 2008: 96-101; Talbot to Feldman, 9 August 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18:51-52; Kennedy to Ben-Gurion, 15 August 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18:60-61.

Even though the Presidential Emissary initially seemed to have some success, Feldman rapidly ran into trouble. The Israelis were hesitant towards the Johnson plan again, because of the informality of the acquiescence the plan required. The Israeli fear was that this would give the Arabs a pretext to accuse Israel of not implementing the wishes of the refugees “when the plan failed.”<sup>368</sup> After Feldman’s return, the Israelis continued to resist the Johnson plan. And an unexpected problem had arisen: Joseph Johnson and Myer Feldman were not saying the same to the Israelis.<sup>369</sup>

In conversations with Israeli leaders, Feldman had given certain reassurances to the Israelis about Israel having the final word on repatriating any refugee. In the meantime, Johnson had made some minimal changes in the language of the plan which now included a call for “UN impartial arbitration of any conflict over admissibility”.<sup>370</sup> Consequently, when the official text of Joseph Johnson’s plan was presented to Israel and the Arabs on 10 September, the Israelis cried out that this new formulation was a threat to their sovereignty. The problems made Feldman doubt there was any solution in sight at all, and he called for US disengagement.<sup>371</sup> Expecting the Johnson plan to fail, another of Kennedy’s advisors, Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff, urged the President to give up on the plan, and to let it die a natural death. “[L]et [the] Arabs take the onus,” was his advice.<sup>372</sup>

Further doubts were raised by the other PCC members. The PCC was not prepared to endorse the Johnson plan before the Middle Eastern states did, but there had been agreement among the members to let Johnson present the plan to the Israelis and the Arab states. The terms were that there would be no further negotiations on details as a result of Johnson’s presentations, and the plan was also not to be publicized.<sup>373</sup>

On top of this, the scheme to sell Hawks in exchange for achieving a refugee settlement was not working out. On 14 September 1962 the US government made the announcement that it was selling the missiles to Israel. The very same day, the Knesset voted against the Johnson plan.<sup>374</sup> Again there was disagreement between US officials on whether this was a result of the US approach. The President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs McGeorge Bundy accused the State Department of “shower[ing] the Middle East with

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<sup>368</sup> Feldman to State Department, 21 August 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18:69; Summit 2008:101-102.

<sup>369</sup> Komer to Bundy, 14 September 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18:96.

<sup>370</sup> Komer to Bundy, 14 September 1962:96.

<sup>371</sup> Summit 2008:102; Komer to Bundy, 14 September 1962:96.

<sup>372</sup> Komer to Bundy, 14 September 1962:97.

<sup>373</sup> Rusk to certain diplomatic posts (circular), 5 September 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18:80.

<sup>374</sup> Summit 2008:102; Rusk to certain posts, 14 September 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18:94-95.

telegrams in praise of the Johnson plan.”<sup>375</sup> In reality, the approach had nothing to do with the Israeli rejection. The fact was that Israel finally had shown its true colours in lack of intent of accepting the Johnson plan.

No matter how much the Americans supported the Johnson plan, its success had been dependent on how it was received among the Middle Eastern states. The Israeli point of view had been, or should have been, clear from the start. They did not trust Johnson, they did not want to make any agreement without considerable and unrealistic Arab concessions, and they were not at all interested in repatriation.<sup>376</sup> But the Arabs were not convinced either. Syria announced its rejection of the plan on 6 October 1962.<sup>377</sup> In Egypt, President Nasser considered the Johnson plan too limited for its scope. Because Johnson never was able to discuss any actual numbers, Nasser’s estimate that Israel might be willing to repatriate about 10 000 Palestinian refugees was as good as any. Nasser did not see this as a realistically acceptable number for either the refugees or the Arab states.<sup>378</sup> The Arab states and the refugees believed the Johnson plan too limited. Israel thought it too extensive. Between these complete opposites there could be no compromise. A short time after the Johnson plan was rejected by Israel, the Arab states made a uniform statement that they did not consider the Johnson plan a “suitable framework for a fruitful discussion”.<sup>379</sup>

The US government had earnestly hoped and believed that Joseph Johnson’s proposals would lead to progress in solving the Palestinian refugee problem. They foresaw difficulties with both the Arab countries and Israel, but they believed these were issues that could be overcome. Unfortunately, they were wrong. The Americans were also wrong in the belief that even if the Johnson proposals were successful, the American involvement in it would be sufficient for the US to be able to disengage from the problem.<sup>380</sup>

Officially, the Johnson mission was not a US initiative. Joseph Johnson was sent to the Middle East as a PCC Special Representative. It was a UN initiative, orchestrated through the PCC, which was a UN commission. However, the United States had been the indisputable leader of the PCC since its beginning. From the US government’s point of view, President Kennedy’s contact with the Arab and Israeli heads of state in May 1961 was the origin of the Johnson initiative, and while Joseph Johnson was not formally associated with the US

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<sup>375</sup> Bundy to Komer, 20 September 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18:111.

<sup>376</sup> Memorandum of drafted by Crawford, 24 August 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18:73-74.

<sup>377</sup> Neff 1995:80.

<sup>378</sup> Cairo to State, 15 November 1962, *CDF 1960-1963*, box 218.

<sup>379</sup> Forsythe 1972:135-136.

<sup>380</sup> Brubeck to Bundy, 9 August 1962, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18:48-50. The United States is still one of the main contributors to UNRWA. UNRWA, “Frequently Asked Questions”, available at the UNRWA website.

government, he cooperated closely with them. The US government was briefed on Johnson's findings before the rest of the PCC, and the Middle Eastern states all assumed that the US was closely invested in the project. This was necessary for them to take the initiative seriously, the Americans believed, while the UN framework was essential to "enhance the palatability of Johnson's proposals."<sup>381</sup> This opinion was shared by Johnson himself, who believed the fact that he had connections within the US State Department without being too closely associated with it was crucial to the level of cooperation he had been able to get from the Middle Eastern heads of state.<sup>382</sup> It is tempting to ask whether the fact that the US sent a Presidential Emissary, one that offered a free carrot to one of the parties, disturbed the non-committal way the US was linked with the Johnson plan. In the end, the lack of the Middle Eastern states' willingness to cooperate and a general lack of support for the Johnson plan was what brought it down.

On 20 December 1962 the UN General Assembly again renewed the UNRWA mandate. Simultaneously, the PCC was thanked for its efforts to shift ground on the refugee question.<sup>383</sup> Despite the limited success of Joseph Johnson's missions, the PCC was instructed by the General Assembly to continue with "its endeavours with the Member States directly concerned."<sup>384</sup> The Americans were pleased that the General Assembly had approved of Johnson and PCC's work, and also that it had dismissed the regular attempts by Israel and its Arab neighbours of proposing unrealistic solutions to the conflict. The Americans considered the General Assembly's disapproval of the "futile partisan proposals" almost equally useful as its endorsement of PCC's "quiet diplomacy course" because this would reinforce any mediator's attempt to make the Israelis and Arabs accept that no solution would be reached unless they gave up some of the more extreme conditions.<sup>385</sup>

Joseph Johnson resigned as PCC special representative on 31 January 1963.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Rusk to Kennedy, 7 August 1962:36.

<sup>382</sup> Memorandum by Crawford, 29 September 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963*, 17:265.

<sup>383</sup> UN A/RES/1856 (XVII), 20 December 1962.

<sup>384</sup> UN A/RES/1856 (XVII), 20 December 1962.

<sup>385</sup> Strong to Talbot, 15 February 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4006.

<sup>386</sup> David P. Forsythe claims that Johnson's resignation was a result of the lack of support he received from the PCC and the United States. However, source material declassified after Forsythe's research took place indicates that Johnson's resignation was planned since before the US support of his work diminished. The reason Johnson gave for his resignation was that his commitment in the Carnegie Endowment, where he continued as president until 1971, was becoming too time-consuming to continue his work for the PCC. I have found no other indications than Forsythe's speculations that a conflict with the PCC and/or the US government was a reason for Johnson's resignation. Ball to the US UN delegation, 28 October 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4005; Memorandum by Crawford, briefing material for the President for meeting with Johnson, 5 February 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4006.

### ***Bilateral Talks Post-Johnson Plan***

Following Joseph Johnson's resignation in early 1963, the PCC was divided with regards to its further progress. The French believed Johnson's proposals had resigned along with him, and the French government was not interested in making further efforts when the Israelis and Arabs were clearly far from reconciliation on the refugee issue.<sup>387</sup> The government of France was interested in hearing what the Americans could achieve through bilateral talks with the Middle Eastern states as long as this did not require any commitment on the part of the PCC or France.<sup>388</sup> However, the French were getting increasingly anxious what the US talks might lead to, and whether the American intention was to pressure the Israelis and Arabs to accept the Johnson plan. Thus Paris sent new instructions to its PCC member, Claude Arnaud, who was forced to return to the Americans with the new French position: France did not support any PCC action at all at this time, and the French government did not appreciate that the US was speaking on its behalf. Annoyed by the French change of heart, the US demanded to know what France proposed the PCC would tell the General Assembly if it did not follow up on the request to continue its diplomacy. To this, the French merely replied that they were not overly concerned with this problem.<sup>389</sup>

The third PCC member, Turkey, pointed out that the conditions in the Middle East were not the best, because of the situation among both the Arabs and the Israelis. The Arab states were divided due to the recent Iraqi revolution and domestic problems in Syria, among other things. According to Turkish Ambassador Menemencioglu, the Arab common strategy when facing internal divergence was to be uncompromising with regards to the Palestinian refugee problem. To ask them to reach some sort of understanding with Israel, and thus a *de facto* recognition of the Jewish state, would be futile at the time. Israel was worried that it would be forced to take large numbers of refugees. Because of these incompatible positions that Johnson's missions had confirmed were still very present, the Turkish government did not think an active role by the PCC was wise at the time.<sup>390</sup>

Despite the misgivings of its PCC partners, the US government was set on conducting high-level, bilateral talks with Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Syria.<sup>391</sup> The Americans agreed with their PCC partners that forcing the Middle Eastern states to accept the Johnson

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<sup>387</sup> Stevenson to State, 20 February 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4006.

<sup>388</sup> Yost to Rusk, 8 February 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4006.

<sup>389</sup> Stevenson to Rusk, 21 February 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4006; Stevenson to Rusk, 20 February 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4006.

<sup>390</sup> Rusk to the US UN delegation, 16 February 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4006.

<sup>391</sup> Rusk to the US UN delegation, 16 February 1963; State to the US UN delegation, 9 October 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4005.

plan would not be fruitful, but the principles Johnson had coined through his missions could be used in further efforts. The American plan was to hold parallel, bilateral talks with the heads of state in Jerusalem and the Arab states, where the US would act as PCC's "executive agent".<sup>392</sup> The Americans wanted to continue exploring what options the Middle Eastern states would be willing to accept to find a solution to the refugee problem. For this purpose the Arabs needed to be more specific about what they were willing to accept if Israel agreed to a certain amount of repatriation. Israel on its part needed to stop being adamant about refusing to accept the refugees' right to return, as established in paragraph 11. The Americans wished to convey to them that they, like the General Assembly, thought it unrealistic of the Israelis to suggest that this paragraph should no longer apply.<sup>393</sup>

Because of the apprehension of the other PCC members, the Americans made a point of stating that while the US would be acting as a PCC member in the bilateral talks, the PCC was without commitment to the "nature or outcome of [the] talks."<sup>394</sup> In retrospect it is pertinent to ask whether it was a wise move to set in motion another initiative with the same informal characteristics that helped bury the Johnson plan so soon after its demise.

Determined to go on, but without PCC backing, the Americans scheduled the talks to commence that spring. Ben-Gurion appeared positive towards the attempts to achieve a solution, and according to the US representative he showed some flexibility in Israeli thinking, but he made no new suggestions himself. The Arab leaders were cordial and attentive, but they made no special comments.<sup>395</sup> The general impression was that the Middle Eastern states still had too many preconditions for any joint efforts to be possible. The Israelis would have to be convinced that the points they demanded the Arabs accept before moving forward would be impossible to obtain. By the time of the second set of talks, the Americans were starting to realize that because of the conditions in the Middle East it might take some time before a solution could be reached. Further, the Americans had already established that despite its role in the quiet talks, the US was not interested in a role as honest broker.<sup>396</sup>

The American optimism was fading. The Arabs and Israelis had not altered their positions at all since the start of the bilateral talks, and the Americans were becoming impatient. They wanted to speed up the talks, and were beginning to demand preconditions of their own. The Americans were still reluctant to take on the role of middle man in any

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<sup>392</sup> Rusk to several diplomatic stations, 6 February 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4002.

<sup>393</sup> Strong to Talbot, 15 February 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4006.

<sup>394</sup> Rusk to several diplomatic stations, 25 February 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4002.

<sup>395</sup> Rusk to the US UN delegation, 24 April 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4005.

<sup>396</sup> Rusk to the US UN delegation, 24 April 1963; Rusk to several diplomatic stations, 13 April 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4005.

potential negotiations, especially if the Israelis and Arabs were not willing to give their assurances that they would be willing to contribute to the solution of the refugee problem.<sup>397</sup>

Israel picked up the American apprehension, but failed to act on it. Instead the Israelis nearly managed to estrange the Americans in their eagerness to find a point of agreement. The American ambassador in Tel Aviv, Walworth Barbour, reported another US-Israeli disagreement after his third session with Prime Minister Levi Eshkol and Foreign Minister Golda Meir. The Israeli leaders were eager to establish that the US agreed with them on certain Israeli-formulated principles, but without Barbour having given consent to this or without him having the authority to agree on behalf of the United States. Instead of securing an accord with Israel, then, Barbour was forced to clarify with the Israeli leaders that no such agreement was established.<sup>398</sup>

Thus, when the United States UN delegation reported back to its PCC colleagues from France and Turkey, it was with a modest optimism. The bilateral talks had not yet reached a point where the Americans thought it fruitful to try to negotiate an agreement between the Middle Eastern states. The points the Americans stressed held warnings for both the Israelis and the Arabs: any future negotiations on the refugee issue could only take place with the understanding that Israel was a sovereign state whose security must be ensured, and that Israel could not talk its way out of the infamous paragraph 11 from the UN resolution 194.<sup>399</sup>

In the Arabs the Americans detected hope that a solution could be found, and for the most part a realization that the majority of the refugees would not be repatriated but would have to be resettled. The critical point still seemed to be whether the Arabs could support a solution that somehow incorporated paragraph 11 without making it necessary for Israel to accept the principle.<sup>400</sup>

The talks with Israel were more detailed. Israel promised cooperation if the Johnson plan was not pressed. Israel was also willing to consider a refugee settlement outside a general settlement if the guiding principle was “some repatriation, much resettlement”. However, Israel was still demanding some preconditions that most likely would be unacceptable to the Arabs.<sup>401</sup>

When the PCC presented this to the UN, it had some unexpected results. In his token speech to the General Assembly, the UN Palestine Refugee Delegation chairman, Ahmed

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<sup>397</sup> Rusk to several diplomatic stations, 4 July 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4005.

<sup>398</sup> Barbour to State, 6 August 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4005.

<sup>399</sup> Rusk to the US UN delegation, 9 October 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4005.

<sup>400</sup> Rusk to the US UN delegation, 9 October 1963.

<sup>401</sup> Rusk to the US UN delegation, 9 October 1963.

Shukairy, derailed from the written text of his speech, turning it into a verbal attack on the PCC and its progress report.<sup>402</sup> Shukairy said that the progress report should be called a “failure report” as no progress had been made. He criticized that the New York-based PCC was out of touch with the realities in the Middle East, and he believed the US “quiet talks” only served to fragment the PCC and thus undermine its power. He also objected to the talks being held “not with legal inhabitants of Palestine but with illegal Israeli invaders.”<sup>403</sup>

Shortly after this another setback came with other Arab reactions to the progress report. Jordan worried that the United States was abandoning paragraph 11 of the famous resolution 194. The American bilateral talks had been presented as talks without preconditions, in an attempt to sound out any new suggestions on either side. However, the Jordanians interpreted this as an indication that the Americans were looking to avoid the difficult paragraph as basis for a refugee settlement.<sup>404</sup> This suspicion was not entirely unfounded. The guiding principle the Americans had been going by in all their dealings with the refugee question was that any solution had to be a combination of repatriation and resettlement, which technically did not allow all refugees to choose to return to Israel if they wished, as the paragraph specified.<sup>405</sup>

Jordanian Foreign Minister Antone Atallah criticized the US for associating itself too closely with the PCC, and the PCC for delegating its tasks to one of its member states. He worried that the Americans were giving up on the refugee problem. He asked if the United States could reaffirm its support of paragraph 11. It was the Jordanian Foreign Minister’s belief that without such a reaffirmation, “the United States will be hurt with Arabs everywhere.”<sup>406</sup> To this Secretary Rusk replied that he was sorry the Americans could not agree with the Arabs in everything, but that he had confidence that the US position with regards to paragraph 11 could be clarified satisfactorily.<sup>407</sup>

But the turn of events in the following months was not beneficial for improved understanding between the US and the Arabs. First, the assassination of President Kennedy

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<sup>402</sup> The Delegation Shukairy headed was the Arab League’s Palestine Refugee Delegation, which is not to be confused with the *permanent* delegation the Palestinians got later. Shukairy had already served as a member of both the Syrian and Saudi Arabian delegations to the UN. Finally, two years after this speech he became the first chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). From “List of Persons” in *FRUS 1961-1963*, 18 and *FRUS 1964-1968*, 18.

<sup>403</sup> Stevenson to Rusk, 6 November 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4005.

<sup>404</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Rusk, the Jordanian Foreign Minister, the Jordanian Ambassador, and representatives from US State Department, 19 November 1963, *CFPF 1963*, box 4005.

<sup>405</sup> UN A/RES/194 (III), 11 Dec 1948.

<sup>406</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Rusk, the Jordanian Foreign Minister, the Jordanian Ambassador, and representatives from US State Department, 19 November 1963.

<sup>407</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Rusk, the Jordanian Foreign Minister, the Jordanian Ambassador, and representatives from US State Department, 19 November 1963.

made further advancement in the refugee problem uncertain since the President had invested so much of himself in the recent US efforts. Secondly, the new president, Lyndon B. Johnson, was perceived by many Arabs as pro-Israeli. This impression was strengthened by President Johnson's speech to the Weizmann institute on 6 February 1964.<sup>408</sup> The view from the Arab world was that the United States was turning more towards Israel.

In a briefing for President Johnson, Secretary Rusk expressed pessimism for any further progress on the refugee problem. He saw no way out of the Israeli categorical refusal of any repatriation. The best the US government could do was to try to preserve the status quo and continue convincing Congress of funding UNRWA.<sup>409</sup>

In early 1964 the PCC found its task of responding to the General Assembly mandate of working towards paragraph 11 more difficult than ever. The Israeli refusal to comply was obvious. In addition the tension was high in the Middle East as a result of the crisis over the shared Jordan waters. And once again the PCC had internal disagreements. The French wanted to do nothing, while the Turkish wished for the PCC to accuse both Israelis and Arabs of lack of cooperation. The US delegation was not eager to make a stand at all, afraid that no matter what they did it would only make matters worse.<sup>410</sup> The end result was that no further direct PCC initiatives were attempted. Instead, the commission returned to its task of indentifying and evaluating refugee properties.<sup>411</sup>

### ***Airlie House Discussions***

The summer of 1964 saw an attempt, initiated by Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Phillips Talbot, to broaden the perspective of the US administration on the Arab-Israeli problem. Talbot invited members of the State Department Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (NEA), along with certain key figures from other foreign policy agencies to a conference that he hoped would act as a "think-session" where the participants might come up with some ideas for what eventually could be worked out to guidelines for future policy decisions.<sup>412</sup> On the first session of the three-day conference, Talbot opened with a statement regarding his hopes for the outcome of the discussion. He encouraged a direct examination of the various aspects of the Palestine problem, taking into account factors such as US domestic interests, communist interests and Arab nationalism.

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<sup>408</sup> Johnson, Lyndon B. "Remarks in New York City at the Dinner of the Weizmann Institute of Science", 6 February 1964.

<sup>409</sup> Rusk to Johnson, 16 January 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, 18:17-23.

<sup>410</sup> Plimpton to State, 27 January 1964, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 2556.

<sup>411</sup> Rusk to the US UN delegation, 7 March 1964, *CFPF 1964-1966*, box 2556.

<sup>412</sup> Talbot to Rusk, 15 June 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, 18:173.

Talbot wanted to explore what the participants could imagine the US could expect with regards to the Arab-Israeli problem over the next two to five years, and he specified that he hoped they would search for constructive approaches and not just short-term tactics to prevent hostilities from breaking out.<sup>413</sup>

Of the topics discussed, the refugee problem got a lot of attention. In review of the recent US policy on the matter, the participants of the conference agreed that the refugee problem was a burden for the US, and that it ideally should disengage from the problem. The PCC membership was described as a liability and a farce, and even though certain dissenting voices indicated that US membership in the commission assured a certain level of control, the majority agreed that the PCC had no usefulness for the US in its current form. As NEA officer Lucien L. Kinsolving phrased it: It might be in the American “national interest to find another ‘sucker’ for the unthankful mediation task.”<sup>414</sup> The participants of the conference also agreed once more to try to reduce the financial burden of UNRWA and place more responsibility of the refugees on the Arab host governments.<sup>415</sup>

Talbot’s intentions were commendable, but the Airlie House discussions hardly resulted in anything groundbreaking. The participants agreed that there were no prospects for any refugee initiatives in 1964 or 1965.<sup>416</sup> In the end, the conclusion of the conference was that “the continuation of an admittedly unsatisfactory status quo in the area is now as much in our national interest as a major initiative.”<sup>417</sup> This was directly in opposition to the infamous paragraph 11, and to the PCC mandate.

This principle continued to guide President Lyndon B. Johnson and his administration. The Johnson administration never made any serious attempts at solving the refugee problem. By the time the 1967 war created another 210 000 Palestinian refugees, Johnson was already too preoccupied with Vietnam to pay much attention to the Middle East.<sup>418</sup>

## ***Lost Opportunities***

Approaching the Palestinian refugee problem between 1956 and 1967, the US failed to recognize the local and regional needs and wants. Israel, especially under Ben-Gurion and

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<sup>413</sup> Airlie House Discussions, First Session, evening 12 June 1964, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs, 1951-1976*, box 1.

<sup>414</sup> Airlie House Discussions, Fourth Session, Evening, 13 June 1964, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs, 1951-1976*, box 1.

<sup>415</sup> Airlie House Discussions, Fourth Session, Evening, 13 June 1964, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs, 1951-1976*, box 1.

<sup>416</sup> Talbot to Rusk, 15 June 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, 18:173-175.

<sup>417</sup> Airlie House Discussions, Fourth Session, Evening, 13 June 1964, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs, 1951-1976*, box 1.

<sup>418</sup> Neff 1995:81.

Meir, was adamant about refusing any considerable refugee settlement within its borders. The Jewish state refused to approach the refugee question except within the framework of a larger settlement, and it skilfully avoided any opportunities for such an agreement. At the same time, the Arab states maintained a firm policy of refusing any official negotiations with Israel. The Arab states were also hesitant to accept the resettlement of the Palestinian refugees within their own borders, both because this was logistically difficult and because the refugee question continued to act as leverage for the Arab states in the larger Arab-Israeli conflict.

The US government failed to acknowledge the full extent of this. In the end, the measures taken to approach the refugee problem were not efficient. They certainly did nothing to contribute to comprehensive peace.

With the brief exception of the Kennedy initiatives between 1961 and 1963, the Americans showed a considerable desire to pull out from any responsibility in the Palestinian refugee problem between 1956 and 1967, but they were unable to do so. The refugee problem was initially considered key to solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, but instead it became one of the major obstacles to any solution. The overall impression is that the US government tried, but failed because of a combination of circumstantial difficulties and a hesitancy to become too involved. The US especially underestimated the Israeli lack of willingness to seek a compromise. They were outmanoeuvred in the Hawk talks, and they were not willing to exert any significant pressure out of fear of making matters worse.

But why did the US keep trying to find a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem despite the many setbacks in this period? There seem to be three main reasons. First of all, the refugee problem was very persistent. The refugees continued to grow in numbers and they represented an unstable element in a region the Americans desperately wanted to keep calm. Secondly, the US commitments were considerable. With a membership in the PCC and the majority of the funding of UNRWA on its shoulders, disengagement was no easy task. The US tried to do so, but this continued to prove difficult. Finally, the Americans and many with them continued to believe that the refugee question was the key to solving the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the absence of a permanent settlement for the refugees, there was little hope to shift any ground on any of the other outstanding questions in the conflict.

## Conclusion

In a memorandum for the Middle East task force on 29 May 1967, the US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Eugene V. Rostow, declared that "[f]or the moment, the chance of immediate Arab-Israeli hostilities has been reduced."<sup>419</sup> In retrospect it is apparent that he was terribly mistaken. It was only a matter of days before hostilities took on a new and unexpected brutality. The war in 1967 changed the political realities of the Middle East, as it firmly established Israel as the strongest military actor in the region. It has been considered a turning point for when US-Israeli relations took a new form from which it merged into the much discussed "special relationship". As has been shown in this thesis, however, this is a truth with modifications. The development of the so-called US-Israeli special relationship started much earlier than 1967, but during the years prior to the 1967 war the relationship suffered certain blows as a result of either US disapproval of Israeli actions; Israeli disappointment with US policy; or a combination of both.

Simultaneously, the US approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the region in general changed. However, this thesis argues that this development started earlier. The US attempts to disengage from the Arab-Israeli conflict, to avoid engaging the Middle Eastern states in any comprehensive peace attempts and simultaneously keeping a hegemonic status in the region started with the 1956 war and continued throughout the period in question.

### ***Why Did the US Not Attempt to Solve the Conflict in the Middle East by Initiating a Comprehensive Peace Negotiation Between the 1956 and 1967 Wars?***

Despite border incidents, water sharing problems, and the continued failure to achieve a permanent solution to the Palestinian refugee problem; the period between the wars in 1956 and 1967 was relatively calm as far as the Middle East was concerned. The state of cold war

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<sup>419</sup> Rostow to the Middle East Task Force, 29 May 1967, Lot Files, *Records Relating to Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs, 1951-1976*, box 26.

between the eastern and western blocks, between the different Arab countries, and between Israel and its Arab neighbors did not evolve into “hot” war during this period. Instead, these eleven years saw several tranquil phases, and in many ways it seemed like a suitable time to seek a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. US leaders had repeatedly exclaimed that the Middle East was important to them and that stability in the region was a top priority. A fundamental necessity to ensure stability in the Middle East was to secure lasting peace. Then why did they not?

Part of the answer is that the United States was preoccupied with Cold War issues. Vietnam, Cuba, Berlin, among others. While the United States *preferred* peace in the Middle East, it gradually became more important to build alliances, to minimize American contribution and above all: to keep the Soviet Union out. The US governments were not willing to risk sacrificing Cold War aims for securing a long term solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict as long as short term stability appeared to rule.

One should also consider, however, whether the US government had any real opportunity to act. All the initiatives the Americans were involved in during the late fifties and early sixties were plagued by the same problem: The Middle Eastern states were not willing to admit the concessions necessary to shift any ground in the problem. The conclusion reached time and again was that without sincere willingness from either side to cooperate on separate parts of the problem, there was little point of attempting to negotiate a comprehensive peace. The conclusion reached by Dulles and Eisenhower after they gave up on project Alpha in 1955, was repeated by the Americans in the years to come: the conflict was not ripe for negotiation.

Instead of promoting negotiations that were assumed by the US government to fail, the Americans decided to try a piecemeal approach and wait for the conflict to become ripe. As it turned out, however, the US proved unable to convince the Middle Eastern states to cooperate even in those smaller initiatives. The Arab-Israeli conflict between 1956 and 1967 had several elements considered crucial for ripeness. There was a mutually hurting stalemate in the conflict since both Israel and the Arab states failed to accomplish their goals. Any unilateral approaches so far had proven unable to create peace or stability. The Arab states and Israel, as well as the potential mediator the US, theoretically sought peace, but each actor wanted it on their own terms. Thus they did not want comprehensive peace enough to sacrifice other interests.

The uncompromising attitudes of the actors involved in the conflict makes it understandable that the US government found it difficult to introduce any comprehensive

peace attempts. Since the previous US attempts to make the Middle Eastern states reach common ground had failed, it is not surprising that the Americans did not consider the conflict ripe for negotiation. However, it must be questioned whether the US choice of abandoning any attempts at comprehensive peace also had something to do with unwillingness. The American policy in the Middle East – as everywhere else – was ruled by US national interests. If peacemaking was not seen as consistent with these interests, the willingness to become involved in the conflict was obviously reduced. Between 1956 and 1967 the main American foreign policy goal was to contain the Soviet Union. It was considered a vital national interest to maintain US hegemony in the Middle East. Peacemaking would only have US approval for as long as it was consistent with this policy.

At the same time, the domestic political situation in the US limited the options for the US government. Traditionally Israel-friendly factions were outraged, and very loudly so, whenever the US administrations attempted to act in any way that would not benefit the Jewish state. The 1953 outcry after the US sanctions towards Israel as a result of the construction in the Syro-Israeli Demilitarized Zone is an example of how difficult it was to apply any sort of pressure on Israel. Similarly, the caution the US administrations had to take when they were nearing an election illustrates how the US domestic political climate affected foreign policy issues.

### ***Changing the US role in the Middle East***

After several failed comprehensive peace attempts before the 1956 war, the US government was reluctant to promote any further efforts. With the changed political balance in the Middle East after the 1956 war, it became more pressing for the Eisenhower administration to find the proper role for the US in the region than it was to promote peace. The top priorities for the US government were to re-establish close contact with its European allies after the Suez-fallout and forming closer ties with the Middle Eastern states – all in the context of keeping the Soviet Union out of the region. Unfortunately, it was impossible to simultaneously satisfy the needs of Israel and the Arab states. The attempts of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations to lead a balanced policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict both failed to appease the local states. Eventually the US policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict caused a polarization of US relations in the region, where friendly relations and close cooperation with Israel and a few selected Arab states caused friction and tension between the US and the remaining Arab states, such as Egypt and Syria.

As a means of firmly establishing the new US role in a region traditionally dominated by Britain, Eisenhower chose to rely on bilateral rather than multilateral approaches. Through the refusal of joining any regional organizations and the subsequent announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the President assured the Middle Eastern countries once and for all that they were either with the US or against it. The message to the Soviet Union was also clear: the US was not willing to give an inch in the Middle East.

### ***Treating Symptoms Rather Than the Cause***

Because of its reluctance to invest any further effort into any comprehensive peace initiatives, in the period 1956-1967 the US administrations attempted several smaller initiatives directed at individually identifiable problems within the larger conflict. The continued attempts at achieving technical agreement on several water sharing schemes, and the Johnson mission for solving the Palestine refugee problem are examples of such initiatives. The intention and hope was that if some level of agreement could be reached in these separate issues, there could eventually be cooperation between the Middle Eastern states in making progress towards peace in the overall conflict.

These initiatives ran into several problems. First of all, none of the issues addressed could be entirely separated from the overall conflict. The Middle Eastern states' reluctance to cooperate to achieve overall peace also applied to the individual issues. Cooperation in piecemeal approaches proved as difficult as cooperation in the comprehensive initiatives of the past.

Secondly, several of the initiatives had fundamental problems that made them unsuitable for the realities in the conflict. The US insistence of maintaining Eric Johnston's plan for water sharing as a "yardstick" for years after it had been rejected by the Middle Eastern states was unfortunate. However, what eventually made it completely impossible to function as the US policymakers had intended, was the fact that the Jordan River riparian states and the US had different perceptions of what the plan entailed.

Similarly, the PCC initiative for refugees failed to take into account the political realities in the Middle East. Joseph Johnson was not able to convince Israel of repatriation or the Arab states of resettlement, and thus his work had no practical effect for the Palestinian refugee problem. The US continuation of the approach even after Johnson resigned, despite the obvious lack of cooperation from the Middle Eastern states, illustrates the discrepancy between how the US perceived the conflict and how it really was.

Finally, the US approach was conflicting and confusing for the Middle Eastern states, as illustrated by their continued demands for clarifications of the US policy. The US wanted an unbiased approach, but often favoured Israel. The American goal was to maintain US hegemony and to keep the Soviet Union out of the Middle East, but simultaneously the US governments hesitated to get too involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The piecemeal initiatives were attempts at uniting these conflicting interests, but the result was that the US managed to get more biased, more involved and their initiatives never actually solved anything. By the time Lyndon B. Johnson took office, the foundation was already made for the bias towards Israel, the disengagement from any peace initiatives, and a reduced willingness to act tough when the Middle East again erupted in war in 1967.

### ***Lack of Will or Forced by Circumstances?***

In the end, there are several reasons why the US failed to create comprehensive peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict between 1956 and 1967. It boils down to a question of whether the lack of US peace initiatives was a conscious decision to avoid engagement because this was in conflict with US interests; or if it was the circumstances that prevented such an initiative even if the US policy makers wanted it.

The answer is that the failure was a result of a combination of the two. There is no doubt that peace, or at the very least stability, in the Middle East was considered important by all the three examined administrations. However, the means to reach such stability, and the definition of what it needed to include, differed significantly.

Eisenhower favoured stability – preferably through the means of a comprehensive peace agreement the states could be held accountable to – because he saw lack of peace in the Middle East as a serious threat to US interests there. The fear of letting the Soviet Union gain ground in the Middle East continuously defined the Eisenhower administration's Middle East policy. However, Eisenhower's efforts to create peace failed, and eventually his belief in the possibility of achieving it was reduced to nothing.

Kennedy's administration started out with a more active approach. Kennedy tried to create a productive relationship with several of the heads of state in the Middle East. During his presidency there were also made attempts in the fields of water cooperation and the refugee issue. However, several additional US policy changes, such as selling arms to Israel and turning a blind eye to the development of the Dimona nuclear reactor did not have a fortunate effect on the conflict. Further, two of the initiatives given particular attention in this thesis, the post-Suez usage of the Eric Johnston plan and the Joseph Johnson PCC mission,

did not in any way help the creation of comprehensive peace. Due to Kennedy's premature death it is difficult to evaluate the consequences of his policies. He might have accomplished more in a second term, as is often the case because US presidents tend to take electoral considerations during their first term.

Lyndon B. Johnson's abrupt entry into his first presidential period after Kennedy's assassination was followed by a short phase where he seemingly did not change the US policy towards the Middle East considerably. In the following years, however, the Johnson administration's polarization of the US approach to the Middle Eastern states was what once and for all settled the US-Israeli special relationship, with all the implications this had for the Arab-Israeli conflict. No comprehensive peace initiatives came about in Johnson's presidency, and under him the US government spectacularly failed to prevent the clash between Israel and its Arab neighbours in 1967. In Johnson's case, however, there also appears to have been a significant "force of circumstances" determining his position. He was not interested in promoting comprehensive peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, Johnson was rather preoccupied with dealing with larger issues in the contemporary domestic and international politics of the US, such as Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement. Thus Johnson is perhaps the one of the three presidents who had the least opportunity to launch any major initiatives in the Middle East.

The conditions were not ripe for comprehensive peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1956. They were not ripe in 1961 when Kennedy became president, and they were not ripe in 1963 when Johnson moved into the White House. They were certainly not ripe in 1967 when the Americans seemed unaware of how close a third Arab-Israeli war was. But the Arab-Israeli conflict does not appear to ever become ripe. A suggestion for further research might be to examine the American decision makers' belief in lack of ripeness of the Arab-Israeli conflict, compared to their willingness to try to reach a solution. If the US governments between 1956 and 1967 were to have had a hand in achieving comprehensive peace in the Middle East, they would have had to give it a try before deciding they failed.

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