

STRATEGIC IMPARTIALITY

*Lyndon B. Johnson's Policy toward Jordan,
1964–1968*

Joakim Aalmen Markussen



Master thesis in history

Department of Archeology, Conservation and History

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Spring 2015

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Print: Reprosentralen, University of Oslo

Preface

The process of writing this thesis has at times been frustrating and tiring. But it has always been rewarding. Somewhat similar to King Hussein of Jordan I have always recovered after times of doubt and confusion, albeit for different reasons. Without the help, advice and encouraging words from a whole lot of people, I am not so sure I would have. I apologize to those I have forgotten here.

First of all, I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor Professor Hilde Henriksen Waage. Her revisions, recommendations, comments and corrections have guided this thesis from a confusing mess into a hopefully understandable study. Helge Jensehaugen deserves special thanks for his many valuable and constructive comments. I would also like to express my thanks to the students under Professor Waage's guidance for their many comments on chapter drafts of dubious quality throughout these two years. And last, without the help from the staff at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, I would either have drowned in the massive ocean of source documents, or not jumped in at all.

Second, I am forever grateful to my parents for being supportive of this project and for always taking time to read my drafts. And to my brother, sisters and the rest of my family for cheering me up and onwards; thank you. I would also like to thank Alvilde for her unconditional supportive encouragement of this endeavor. And for listening to me ramble on about the Middle East at odd hours.

Last, but by no means least, I am truly thankful to all of my fellow students at the third floor of Niels Treschow building at the University of Oslo. They have made these two years as joyful as only students of history knows how. They deserve special thanks for the many long lunches and football practices. But most importantly for enabling me to take my mind off the thesis and just have a good time with friendly people. To my other friends I apologize for my long absence. I am now ready to make amends.

Oslo, May 10, 2015.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In June 1967, Jordan joined the Arab side of the Six-Day War against Israel. King Hussein of Jordan saw no other option than to join the rising tide of radical Arab nationalism. After years of strenuous effort to insulate King Hussein from the influence of radical Arab states, United States President Lyndon Baines Johnson's Middle East policy had failed to fulfill its primary objective: maintaining a stable and peaceful *status quo* in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The American relationship with the young King Hussein in Jordan had long since been aimed to preserve some moderation in the conflict, but it was spawned from the perceived necessity to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining access to the Middle East's economic and geographic assets. Like his predecessors, President Johnson's Middle East policy was originally aimed to promote American national interests in the region's geopolitical values and its vast reserves of natural resources.¹

Johnson's domestic popularity was wearing thin by the deteriorating campaign in Vietnam that took precedence in his foreign policy.² In the Middle East, however, Israel evoked strong feelings of sympathy and generated support on the American domestic scene. Israel served as a platform on which Johnson could strengthen his popularity and support for other foreign and domestic policies. Johnson's Middle East policy was therefore balanced on his personal and his electorate's sympathy for Israel's security, and the strategic necessity to prevent the spread of Soviet influence in the Arab states. As the tensions of the Arab-Israeli conflict were rising, the Johnson administration came to realize that King Hussein's moderate regime not only prevented Soviet influence: It also safeguarded Israel's security. In Jordan, President Johnson found a partner who supported two key elements of American national interests.

The guiding research question of this thesis is, why and how was the US-Jordan relationship affected by the American sympathy for Israel during 1964–1968? Two interrelated questions arise from the foregoing: Why did the Johnson Administration not strengthen King Hussein to withstand the Arab nationalism's calls for war in June 1967? And which political concerns influenced the nature of the US-Jordan relationship?

¹ This study takes for granted the general consensus among knowledgeable scholars of the field that 1) containment of the Soviet Union, 2) oil interests and 3) domestic sympathy for Israel, constituted American national interests in the Middle East. William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2005). 11–15.

² Arlene Lazarowitz, "Different Approaches to a Regional Search for Balance: The Johnson Administration, the State Department, and the Middle East, 1964–1967," *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 1 (2008). 28; Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It: A Secretary of State's Memoirs* (London: Tauris, 1991). 384–387.

This thesis studies the foundation, dynamics and development of the United States-Jordan relationship during 1964–1968. It studies why and how, and from where the relationship was changed and challenged. While not a comprehensive examination of US Middle East policy, this study investigates and examines the complexities of American Middle East policy toward a recipient which, unlike most Middle East states, accepted the United States' close ties to Israel. In that respect, this analysis offers an outlook on American Middle East policy which has not yet been thoroughly examined. The study is intended to empirically and chronologically illustrate how Israel participated in shaping the complex nature of the American understanding of Jordan, and what consequences this had for the Johnson administration's relationship with King Hussein.

Pillars of Policy: American Interest in the Middle East

The Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union and the desire to stop the spread of communism permeated American foreign policy in the post-World War Two era. The Middle East's geographic location posed as important strategic benefits in a potential global war against the Soviet Union, and access to three continents was a tempting asset for American military planners. These concerns constituted the American *geopolitical* interest in the Middle East. Moreover, as demonstrated by two world wars, oil was essential for battlefield victories. The ongoing Cold War made it important to secure oil resources and the military edge it symbolized. The Arab states' oil and the vast income it provided were also essential in the effort to rebuild the economies of Western Europe. Oil thus constituted American *economic* interest in the region.³ American *strategic* interests in the Middle East encompassed these economic and geopolitical concerns.

Since its establishment in 1948, Americans had been highly sympathetic to the Jewish state of Israel. The revelation of the Holocaust and the terror the Jews had endured in Europe had accelerated American support for Jewish nationalism. Moreover, the Jewish settling of the biblical land in Palestine evoked feelings of prophetic dimensions among Jews, Christians and the general public in America. Israel occupied a prominent position in the minds of both the elected officials and the electorate. Israel had primacy in the frame of reference in which Americans viewed the Middle East. Arabs and Palestinians hardly figured in the American

³ Peter L. Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005). 7.

understanding of the region, and when they did it was as Israel's adversaries.⁴ The inherent sympathy for Israel thus constituted the American *domestic* interests in the Middle East.

The Arab states on the one hand ensured American strategic interests. Israel provided domestic support on the other hand. Preserving economic and geopolitical interests thus implied a vital element of pro-Arab relations, whereas domestic concerns often called for a pro-Israel policy.⁵ In that respect Jordan was in a peculiar position. King Hussein was suspicious of Soviet influence, and he was moderate toward Israel. In Jordan, the Johnson administration could pursue strategic containment of Soviet influence and protect Israel's security. By supporting Jordan the Johnson administration could also present an image of impartiality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. While enabling the administration to maintain a close relationship with Israel, such impartiality also stabilized the region, made the Arab states less receptive to Soviet overtures, and secured a steady flow of oil to America's allies.⁶ However, Johnson's presidency coincided with increased tensions and eventually war in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Johnson faced the daunting challenge of how to bridge conflicting national interests.⁷

Decision-making: Theoretical Perspectives

In the American government, the secretary of state and the president set the ground rules for foreign policy. There are several theories on how such rules are laid out. The *rational-actor* model holds that the president and secretary of state always act to promote and advance national interest in foreign policy. A former national security advisor to presidents Nixon and Carter, and later scholar of the Middle East, William B. Quandt, points to the consistent line of American Middle East policy after 1967 as possible evidence of rational actors in the Oval Office.⁸ A second model, the *bureaucratic* theory, assigns the competition between rivaling institutions higher importance than single rational actors. The views of the State Department, the Department of Defense, the White House, the CIA and the National Security Council (NSC) competed for President Johnson's attention and endorsement. This study has found

⁴ Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). 1–8. Throughout this thesis, the term 'Palestinian' refers to the Arab population of Mandatory Palestine and the refugees who fled to Jordan after Israel's creation in 1948.

⁵ Though it is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that Johnson, for his support of the Civil Rights movement, faced continuous domestic opposition from his Republican counterparts. Israel was by no means his sole domestic concerns. See for example Bruce J. Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement*, Rev. ed. (Harlow: Longman, 2008). 93–95, 110–111, 119–123.

⁶ Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire*. 19, 28, 47–50.

⁷ Quandt, *Peace Process*. 13–14.

⁸ *Ibid.* 7.

several instances of competing and conflicting advice, making the bureaucratic model largely applicable. However, it was always the President who finally decided which advice to follow. Bureaucrats could only submit suggestions and recommendations.⁹

Yet another theory is that *domestic* considerations dictate the outcome of foreign policy. The domestic political scene in America is highly entangled in foreign policy, especially when it comes to Middle East policy. Congress wields control over the budget, and congressional support is necessary to continue foreign aid programs. Domestic lobbies are able to affect legislators to advance their views, and political parties are not always in accord as to what constitutes national interests, or how they are best preserved. Since Israel occupied such a prominent position in the American understanding of the Middle East and the Arab states did not, adopting a pro-Israel policy generated popularity for the administration. Going in the opposite direction implied criticism from domestic interest groups and political parties in their competition for the electorate's support.¹⁰

Since 1964 Jordan and Israel were on opposite sides of an increasingly explosive conflict. The US could not support one side without alienating the other. The bureaucratic model assigns the State Department, the CIA, the NSC and other government institutions a higher degree of importance than the president in policy formulation, but all these institutions tended to view the Soviet Union's influence as the most important threat to American national interests. The obvious way to face that challenge would be to support Arab states, the largest constellation of states in the region. However, even a quick glance at Johnson's Middle East policy reveals that it was never essentially pro-Arab. The domestic model, although it emphasizes the American sympathy and support to Israel, fails to explain that several Arab states also received military and economic support from the US.¹¹ This study is not wedded to any one theory, but will rather use elements of all three to illustrate the various considerations Johnson had to take into account, and which advice the president chose to act upon.

Thus, for this study, President Johnson is assumed to be the *rational actor* who acted upon advice from *bureaucrats* of competing agencies. However, the president was keenly aware of *domestic* sentiments and restraints. Being the undisputed leader of the executive branch,

⁹ Ibid. 7–8.

¹⁰ Ibid. 7–8.

¹¹ The Eisenhower Doctrine is likely the most clear-cut manifestation of American support to the Arab states. Under the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower the US dispensed “tens of millions of dollars in economic and military aid” to the Arab states. Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire*. 42–43.

Johnson nonetheless had the final word in policy formulation, and Johnson laid out the Middle East policy based on his perception of the Middle East. This does not mean that Johnson can be blamed or held responsible for the outcome of foreign policy or for events which emanated in the Middle East during his presidency. Rather, this thesis will show how Johnson, presumably to the best of his ability and understanding of the Middle East, tried to maneuver between vast amounts of recommendations and advice to formulate a policy which he believed to be best suited to promote American national interests as these came under increasing pressure. His policy was nonetheless a result of deliberate decisions.

The Johnson Administration and the Middle East

Lyndon B. Johnson had been a staunch supporter of Israel since his days as Senate majority leader during Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency. Upon John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963, Johnson told Israeli officials, "You have lost a great friend ... but you have found a better one."¹² Personally, Johnson took great interest in the well-being of Israel. Palestinians and Arabs did not factor in Johnson's perception of the Middle East, but Israelis vividly did, and Israel's interests were always at the core of Johnson's Middle East policy. The Middle East mindset Johnson brought into the Oval Office was one wherein Israel was the center of attention. His views were largely shaped and upheld by his pro-Israel advisors, who all shared the common American mindset about Arabs and the Middle East. Due to the absence of Arab states and the Palestinians in the administration's minds, Johnson never really addressed the Arab-Israeli conflict as one between Israel and Palestinians. He was therefore inclined to believe moderate states such as Jordan acted upon pressure from other Arab states, and failed to contemplate that King Hussein was forced to consider the demands of his large Palestinian population.¹³

There were rarely disputes over the basic fact that Israel was America's most important and most trusted partner in the Middle East. The largely uniform pro-Israel environment of Johnson's inner circle of advisors did, however, realize the dangers of publicly declaring its position, but for reasons other than taking on true evenhandedness in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The real reason for the seemingly impartial policy was fear of making the Arab states side with the Soviet Union, giving communism access to the geopolitical and economic resources in the Middle East. An evenhanded approach enabled the Johnson administration to preserve

¹² Douglas Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 4 (1993). 573.

¹³ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*. 109-115.

its strategic interests in the Arab world while simultaneously developing close ties to Israel. This was the policy of strategic impartiality. Under a veil of impartiality Johnson concealed that Israel's interests were always at the core of his administration's Middle East policy. Depending on the events in Middle East, Johnson's image of impartiality could be strengthened or threatened, and there were supporters of both extremes in Johnson's administration. Secretary of State Dean Rusk was Johnson's most important foreign policy advisor and although Rusk's mindset about the Middle East was equally Israel-centered, he realized the dangers of openly adopting a pro-Israel policy. Rusk's State Department often came out siding with the Arab states at times of disputes with the White House. The State Department enjoyed wide mandates, and the secretary of state was willingly accepted in Johnson's inner circle of advisors.¹⁴

The White House's primary institution for formulating foreign policy was the National Security Council (NSC), which was comprised of "senior national security advisors and cabinet officials."¹⁵ The NSC advised Johnson to act in the interest of national security. This, more often than not, "may fly in the face of the President's own feelings about Israel."¹⁶ To many of the NSC advisers, the criticality of denying the Soviet Union an entrance to the Middle East outweighed domestic considerations. The same was often true for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the State Department's Office for Near East Affairs (NEA). Both tended to view Soviet influence as the most pressing threat to American interests in the Middle East. It was against the domestic interests of the White House that the advice from these agencies was weighed and often found too light.¹⁷

President Johnson was surrounded by a group of close advisors, some in unofficial capacity, and all tended to view Israel with a similar degree of sympathy. Some were clearly opposed to foreign concerns when it went against the President's feelings about Israel, and others were willing to reject domestic concerns. Few managed to incorporate challenging views in their recommendations to Johnson, but such key pragmatists occupied important seats around

¹⁴ Zara Steiner, "Decision-Making in American and British Foreign Policy: An Open and Shut Case," *Review of International Studies* 13, no. 1 (1987). 7.

¹⁵ The White House, the Administration, "National Security Council", accessed March 26, 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/nsc>.

¹⁶ Saunders to Rostow, May 31, 1967, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS 1964-1968*), Vol. XIX, *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War 1967*, Document 114.

¹⁷ Historian Zara Steiner argues that the formulation of foreign policy as early as Eisenhower's presidency had begun to shift from the State Department to the White House's National Security Council and that "admission [to the NSC] came to be restricted to those who would say what the President hoped to hear". Steiner, "Decision-Making in American and British Foreign Policy." 7.

Johnson's table. Foremost among these men were the staff members of the NSC and Johnson's special advisors for national security affairs, Robert W. Komer, McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow. Though all three shared the President's sympathies for Israel and appreciated how domestic popularity often hinged on the pro-Israel element of the Middle East policy, they were seldom willing to reject strategic concerns when such interests were pressured by domestic sentiment. The special advisors served as intermediaries between the President and Rusk's State Department, and thus they managed to assess both domestic and foreign interests in their recommendations to Johnson.¹⁸

Historiography and Literature

There are countless literary works covering the topic of American Middle East policy during the Cold War. The opening of previously closed archives in USA, Britain and Israel during the 1980s and 1990s made new source material available for historians. The new archival material spurred an interest in reexamination of the earlier accounts, thus marking the beginning of revisionist Middle East history. The traditional historiography of the Middle East can be briefly summed up as follows: The Arab states have pointed to the lack of great-power support and other external factors to explain their defeats and struggles.¹⁹ The Israelis have heavily emphasized their heroic struggle against a unified and intransigent Arab enemy which has always wanted to destroy Israel.²⁰ Drawing on new source material, these traditional explanations have been modified during the last two to three decades.

Despite revision and rewriting, accounts of great-power influence still remain a prominent feature of Middle East historiography. However, modern historiography of the Cold War has revised traditional accounts of the superpowers' global involvement. This involvement stemmed not only from their competition for spheres of influence, but also from being invited into competition by regional actors. Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis claims that "peripheries [manipulate] centers rather than the other way around."²¹ This has had consequences for the understanding of Jordan's relationship with the superpowers as well.

¹⁸ Rusk was impressed with the special advisor's ability to assess challenging views: "We worked so closely together that I regarded the National Security staff at the White House as almost another wing of the State Department." Rusk, *As I Saw It*. 452.

¹⁹ Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, "Introduction," in *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, ed. Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 4.

²⁰ Avi Shlaim, "Israel and the Arab Coalition in 1948," in *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, ed. Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 79.

²¹ John Lewis Gaddis, "On Starting All over Again: A Naïve Approach to the Study of the Cold War," in *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory*, ed. Odd Arne Westad (London: Frank Cass, 2000). 31.

Whereas the traditionalist outlook on Jordan in the Cold War era claimed that Jordan was “merely responding to pressures emanating from Washington and Moscow, rather than shaping its own destiny”, the revised thesis is that “the Jordanian regime used external support to construct a durable policy capable of withstanding the challenges of radical pan-Arabism, the Arab-Israeli conflict and internal opposition.”²²

Due to easy accessibility to primary sources, the US-Israel relationship has been studied by countless authors in even larger numbers of books and articles. American relations toward Jordan have on the other hand received little attention in the modern historiography of the Middle East. Professor in history Douglas Little’s “A puppet in search of a Puppeteer?” (1995), and university lecturer in history Zach Levey’s “United States Arms sales policy toward Jordan 1963–1968” (2006) stand out as important works. These journal articles address King Hussein’s maneuvering in direction of tighter alignment with the US and the motivation behind the American arms sales to Jordan, respectively. Both articles have focused rather narrowly on their subjects, and neither piece addresses how the American policy toward Jordan was influenced by Israel at necessary length. The same is true for historian Lawrence Tal’s “Jordan” in *The Cold War in the Middle East* (1997) edited by Middle East historian and professor Avi Shlaim and political scientist Yezid Sayigh. Tal studies how Jordan played the Cold War game to its own benefit, but he deals only episodically with the Six-Day War and does not investigate how Israel participated in shaping America’s understanding of Jordan.²³

Nonetheless, Jordan has been the focus of several studies, albeit to various extents. *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (2007) by Avi Shlaim is a thorough and well-documented study of King Hussein’s reign in Jordan. *Lion of Jordan* sheds light on the Jordanian assessments on the Middle East conflicts and how the king responded to those conflicts. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (2000), also written by Avi Shlaim, examines Israeli policy toward Jordan and Israel’s assessments of King Hussein, both of which were closely intertwined with the American perception of Jordan. *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences* (2012) edited by Avi Shlaim and historian Wm.

²² Lawrence Tal, “Jordan,” in *The Cold War in the Middle East*, ed. Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).102.

²³ Douglas Little, “A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer? The United States, King Hussein, and Jordan, 1953-1970,” *The International History Review* 17, no. 3 (1995); Zach Levey, “United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963–68,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 3 (2006); Lawrence Tal, “Jordan,” in *The Cold War in the Middle East*, ed. Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

Roger Louis deals with all the participants' strategies and conduct of the Six-Day War in 1967 and helps examine the intricacies of the inter-Arab rivalry and how it affected King Hussein's policymaking.²⁴

Important works on American Middle East policy include Douglas Little's *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (2008). *American Orientalism* explores the various pillars of American Middle East policies and their significance. *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (2005) by diplomatic historian Peter L. Hahn examines how the events in the Middle East have affected US foreign policy. Former CIA analyst Kathleen Christison's *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (2000) is an example of how the role and influence of the great powers have also undergone revision. *Perceptions of Palestine* examines the lack of significance that Arabs had in US policymakers' minds and the equivalent prominent position had by Israelis.²⁵ All these works are extensive, but few have linked the American understanding of Jordan to the close US-Israel relationship. This study will fill some of the gap in the literature by exploring how Israel took part in shaping and influencing the Johnson administration's perception of King Hussein and Jordan.

Sources

The source material for this study is a combination of the aforementioned literature and declassified documents from the Johnson administration. The majority of the primary source material is found in the *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*. The *FRUS* volumes contain "documents from Presidential libraries, Departments of State and Defense as well as other agencies."²⁶ The Office of the Historian at the United States Department of State has "included documentation that illuminates the formulation of foreign policy and the repercussions of their effects."²⁷ The *FRUS* documents make up the bulk of the source material for this study. Important documents in the *FRUS* series are memoranda of conversations as well as minutes of meetings from the top level of the American government.

²⁴ Avi Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000); Wm Roger Louis and Avi (eds.) Shlaim, *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁵ Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Peter L. Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005); Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

²⁶ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "About the *Foreign Relations of the United States Series*," accessed October 31, 2013. <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/about-frus>.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

Although the two *FRUS* volumes relevant for this thesis are available online, some documents are not printed.

At the United States National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland (NARA), several more documents have been studied for this thesis. All researched documents in College Park were from the State Department's Record Group 59, Central Foreign Policy Files 1964–1966 and 1967–1969. Several hundred telegrams between the US embassies in the Middle East and the State Department helped shed light on which information was passed to the upper levels of government and on how the top level was informed of developments in Jordan, Israel and the wider Middle East. In analyzing the American policy during Johnson's presidency, these documents offer an unaltered, unfiltered and somewhat personal consideration of the situation. Researchers can easily follow how events and situations were discussed between embassies and then, via the State Department's reply, trace the effect of their recommendations. Several documents were sent hastily, especially during the Six-Day War in June 1967, and these telegrams, airgrams and situation reports offer largely unaltered information of the events they are discussing.

Access to Jordanian archives is difficult to acquire. Some scholars even question if there is anything of significance in them, if the sources still exist. In any case, Jordanian sources are likely to be in Arabic, a language this author has not mastered and which would demand extensive effort to translate. Where understanding Jordanian assessments and perceptions is necessary, this study has utilized the literary works on King Hussein's regime as well as the US Embassy in Amman's many telegrams and airgrams. Since this study concentrates on the *American* assessments of Jordan, less significance is attached to the Jordanian perception of the events. American policymakers reported events as they perceived them, and how this perception affected the higher levels of the US government is the key focus for this study. The literature serves as the basis for understanding the longer lines, ambitions and assessments of American Middle East policy, whereas the primary source material will reveal how this policy affected, and *was* affected by events in Jordan and the Middle East.

Source Problems

In all historical narratives, a source's significance is weighed against other sources, the historiography and common knowledge to determine its truthfulness. To ensure truthfulness, authors have to consider sources that do not support the hypothesis, but for the sake of readability and understandability of the narrative a selection must be imposed. Assessing

every single source and weighing its significance against all other sources would lead to thousands of pages only to describe the simplest event or decision-making process. For practical reasons, some sources must be judged as more important and some as less important, but the selection must be made truthfully to the best of the historian's ability. Also, for the sake of readability and delimitation of material, historical narratives often simplify the retelling of decision-making processes. The use of terms such as 'Washington's view,' 'in the view of the State Department' and 'the views held in the administration' adds up to a readable, understandable and, to the extent possible, comprehensive character of the narrative.

This rarely, if ever, implies that every official in every office of the State Department, the CIA, the NSC, the White House or the administration held the same views. The problem of whose views were advanced is even more acute when analyzing specific primary source documents. Telegrams from the State Department often carry Secretary Rusk's name at the end, indicating that every telegram was read and authorized by the secretary of state. Regarding the amount of documents, Rusk himself said that he saw less than one percent of the more than two million telegrams that were sent during his tenure.²⁸ The day-to-day maneuvering of policy was delegated to hundreds of officials in the State Department and they did a remarkable job: Rusk said that "I can recall only 4 or 5 [telegrams] that had to be called back and rewritten because their authors missed the point of policy the president and I expected them to follow."²⁹ It is nonetheless reasonable to believe that Rusk, and at some occasions the president, read and approved documents which affected important issues of policy before they were sent. Memoranda from the *FRUS* volumes carry the same discrepancy: A signature does not necessarily imply approval or authorship, and the truthfulness might be compromised by the note taker and his or her personal perceptions. It is when faced with the actual decisions and events that historians can make a truthful and calculated estimation as to which documents and recommendations had effect on decision-makers, and which ones did not.

These problems are, of course, true for all historical writing, and the same problems are shared by all authors of all documents, journal articles and books that have been researched for this study. It therefore feels necessary to emphasize that this thesis is an imposed narrative. It was not inherent in the source material. It was not unveiled or uncovered in the folders and boxes of the National Archives building at College Park, or from the variety of

²⁸ Rusk, *As I Saw It*. 459.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 459–460.

FRUS documents. The sources point in all sorts of directions, and it is this author who has analyzed them to tell a narrative of American policy toward Jordan during 1964–1968. The sources in themselves do not. The researched documents were for the most part from the top level of the American government, and although it might not be an exhaustive investigation of all relevant sources, they are sufficient to justify the conclusion.

Chapter 2: Jordan, a Life on the Line

Between the first Arab-Israeli War in 1948 and Lyndon Baines Johnson's ascendancy to the presidency of the United States in 1963, the Middle East witnessed the creation of Israel and the collapse of Britain's hegemony in the region. In the vacuum of Britain's retreat, USA entered the Middle East scene. Closely linked to these external changes was the rise of Arab nationalism, the rivalry between the Arab states, the Arab-Israeli dispute and the question of the Palestinian refugees. When Hussein bin Talal, then only eighteen years old, was crowned king of Jordan in May 1953, he had to face these foreign and domestic challenges, which as events unfolded illustrated that his reign depended largely on his personal handling of them. The delicate maneuvering between the many potential, but potent threats to his regime led King Hussein to seek a closer relationship with the United States.³⁰

Deeply influenced by the proud legacy of his family, which claimed to descend from the Islamic prophet Mohammed, King Hussein's guiding principle was protecting the interests of his Hashemite family dynasty.³¹ The young King's first decade in power was more of a steep learning curve than a calculated course of action, and a striking feature of King Hussein's early reign is the lack of a consistent policy. King Hussein changed his policies several times during the 1950s and early 1960s. In foreign policy he sided with the Arab states and Arab nationalism, with Britain, the Arab states once more and Britain again before he eventually partnered with the US. In domestic policy King Hussein supported liberalization and was personally nationalistic in his aspirations before he took an authoritarian and conservative line. Nationalism and foreign support is necessarily mutually exclusive, but the king tried to find a middle ground. In his search for a middle ground, King Hussein learned how to use the Cold War to consolidate his regime and build a "durable state."³²

Why did King Hussein eventually move in the direction of a partnership with the United States? And how did King Hussein's search for a middle ground between nationalism and foreign support affect Jordan's position in the Arab world?

³⁰ Tal, "Jordan." 114, 117.

³¹ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 75.

³² Tal, "Jordan." 124.

King Abdullah's Legacy: Jordan in the Arab World

In the so-called McMahon-Hussein correspondence (1915–1916), Britain promised Sharif Hussein of Mecca that he would rule a united Arab nation in return for his efforts in leading the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire in the First World War.³³ By the end of the war, however, Britain's pen had been diligently used on the Middle East map. An agreement with France in 1916 declared that Syria and Lebanon were in the French sphere of influence, while Transjordan and Palestine were under British supervision.³⁴ In 1917 Britain further complicated their promise to Sharif Hussein by declaring that Palestine, part of the land which had been promised to him, was to be the national home of Jews.³⁵ Two of Sharif Hussein's sons, Faisal and Abdullah, were appointed to serve under British supervision as kings of the British mandates in Iraq and Transjordan.³⁶

Ever since its unusual inception in April 1921, Mandatory Transjordan had been an artificial creation.³⁷ Transjordan made no sense in terms of historical unity, and the land lacked all significant natural resources. The barren desert land and its nomadic peoples were held together only by British subsidies and the British-commanded army. When Transjordan was awarded independence in 1946, King Abdullah changed the name of the land to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. True independence was, however, not yet granted, and Jordan was completely dependent on British subsidies.³⁸ The army was the key to Jordan's survival, but the Arab Legion, as the army often was called, was Arab only in name, and it was under the near-complete command of British officers.³⁹

King Abdullah had explored ways to enlarge his kingdom ever since he had been appointed to rule Transjordan. He sought a land more similar to what had been promised to his father, and he nursed his father's ambition to assert the Hashemite family as leaders of the Arab world. Arab nationalism was emerging in the Middle East, and its prime objective was unification of

³³ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 4.

³⁴ In the Sykes-Picot Agreement France and Britain split the Middle East into spheres of influence. Britain was assigned Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine, and the French assumed responsibility for Syria and Lebanon. Sykes-Picot Agreement, May 16, 1916, accessed March 17, 2015. <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/232358BACBEB7B55852571100078477C>.

³⁵ The Balfour Declaration gave official British support to Jewish immigration to Mandatory Palestine, and the establishment there of a "national home for the Jewish people". Balfour Declaration November 2, 1917, accessed March 17, 2015. <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/E210CA73E38D9E1D052565FA00705C61>.

³⁶ Hilde Henriksen Waage, *Konflikt Og Stormaktspolitikk I Midtøsten* (Kristiansand: Cappelen Damm akademisk, 2013). 292.

³⁷ Winston Churchill, during his tenure as British colonial minister created Transjordan "by the stroke of a pen on a sunny Sunday afternoon." Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 13, 17–18.

³⁸ Tal, "Jordan." 104; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 16–20.

³⁹ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 16–20.

all Arabs in an unspecified Arabia. King Abdullah wanted to spearhead this nationalism by realizing his Greater Syria scheme, a territorial ambition which implied Hashemite rule over Jordan, Syria, and Palestine.⁴⁰ However, by the mid-1940s only Mandatory Palestine was within King Abdullah's reach. The king's dreams of territorial expansion were reduced to a scheme which only included Jordan and Palestine, and he found that Britain supported his ambitions to seek realization of Greater Transjordan.⁴¹ The reason was largely because Britain's control over Palestine had become troubled by ever-deteriorating relations between local Palestinians and Jewish immigrants who began targeting the British care-takers.⁴²

In 1947, Britain announced its withdrawal from Palestine and assigned its problems to the United Nations (UN). King Abdullah now saw an opportunity to implement his plans for Greater Transjordan, and he had no qualms in depriving the Palestinians of the statehood that was outlined in the UN Partition Plan for Palestine in 1947.⁴³ To incorporate as much territory as possible, King Abdullah understood that he needed consent from the large and politically forceful Zionists who also had been proposed to rule sovereign parts of Mandatory Palestine. The Arab states opposed the UN partition plan and viewed a Jewish state in their neighborhood as completely unacceptable. King Abdullah was nonetheless focused on completing his territorial ambitions and secretly engaged in talks with the Zionists. In early May 1948 the Zionists made it unmistakably clear that they did not want to become part of a Greater Transjordan under King Abdullah's rule, but the king was set on territorial expansion. King Abdullah settled for the conquest of the parts of Palestine which were designated to become the Palestinian state, and he scored Zionist approval for his plans as long as he avoided the areas designated to become Israel.⁴⁴

Against the massive Arab opposition against the Jewish state the UN had proposed, King Abdullah took a radically different approach than his fellow Arab statesmen. The Arab states collectively declared that they would use military means to resist the establishment of a Jewish state. They agreed to unite their armies and planned to crush the Jewish state and

⁴⁰ Ibid. 18–20.

⁴¹ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 21; Avi Shlaim, "The Debate About 1948," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 3 (1995). 293.

⁴² Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 24.

⁴³ After Britain announced it would withdraw from Palestine by May 1948, the United Nations General Assembly voted, on November 29, 1947, in favor of partitioning Mandatory Palestine into one Jewish and one Arab state. United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 181, November 29, 1947, accessed March 26, 2015 <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/5ba47a5c6cef541b802563e000493b8c/7f0af2bd897689b785256c330061d253?OpenDocument>.

⁴⁴ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 29–30; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 21–26.

liberate Palestine from British imperialism and Zionist aspirations. Apart from agreeing that a Jewish state was unacceptable, the Arab coalition disagreed on everything else. In public, the Arab leaders outbid each other in the condemnation of the UN's decision, a Jewish state, and all of its supporters. In private, however, the Arab coalition could not agree on how the campaign would be carried out, the administration of supply lines or even who would command the attacks.⁴⁵

The reason for the Arab coalition's lack of unity lay in part with the Arab leader's intense suspicion of King Abdullah. They questioned whether the king was true to the campaign or whether he would exploit the situation to seek territorial expansion. Constantly in fear of being left in the dark or at least to check King Abdullah's room for maneuver, the Arab leaders would rather see the whole of Palestine become Israel than see King Abdullah expand his kingdom.⁴⁶ The result was "one of the most divided, disorganized and ramshackle coalitions in the entire history of warfare."⁴⁷ Egypt and Saudi Arabia gambled that King Abdullah would not risk betraying the Arab cause by using the coalition to pursue his personal ambitions. They put their faith in King Abdullah's loyalty and made him Commander in Chief of the Arab coalition.⁴⁸ Their gamble failed miserably. King Abdullah's sights were dead set on territorial enlargement, and he made last minute changes to the battle plans in order to prevent the other Arab armies from interfering with his plans to present the annexation of the West Bank of the Jordan River as a *fait accompli*.⁴⁹

By the end of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, King Abdullah had captured the West Bank and Old City of Jerusalem, but he held his army away from the areas designated to the Jewish state. Abdullah had honored his agreement with the Zionists, and he claimed to have fulfilled his duties as leader of the Arab coalition. In King Abdullah's view, holding the West Bank was better than allowing it to befall the Jewish state. However, neither Arab leaders nor Palestinians accepted King Abdullah's reasoning, and he was blamed for the Arab defeat and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. By the Palestinian refugees and his fellow Arab statesmen, King Abdullah was portrayed as a villain who had conspired with the enemy to enlarge his kingdom at their expense.⁵⁰ In reality all the Arab states had gone to war

⁴⁵ Shlaim, "The Debate About 1948." 299–300.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 299.

⁴⁷ Shlaim, "Israel and the Arab Coalition in 1948." 82.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 86–87.

⁴⁹ The West Bank of the Jordan River had been assigned to the Palestinian state that was outlined in the UN Partition Plan for Palestine in 1947. Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 28.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 29, 31.

for their own national interests, but by singling out Jordan as the real reason for the Arab defeat, the other Arab states absolved their records and used the excuse to scapegoat Jordan.⁵¹ Consequently, King Abdullah and Jordan were isolated from the Arab world. King Abdullah had accomplished his dream of territorial expansion, but it was far less territory than he originally had envisaged, and it had come with a costly price. Large numbers of Palestinian refugees gave a massive upsurge in Jordan's population, and they naturally felt dissociated with their new ruler.⁵²

The numerous Palestinians in Jordan posed a challenge to King Abdullah's regime. The Palestinians found Egypt and Syria's aggressive propaganda more appealing than the Jordanian citizenship King Abdullah extended to them. King Abdullah was aware of the developments, and he wanted a settlement with Israel to secure the West Bank as Jordanian territory. However, he backed down when rumors of plots and unrest reached alarming levels. Palestinian nationalists felt that if they could not return to their homes, they would not live in a kingdom where King Abdullah was ruler. They decided to act. On July 20, 1951, King Abdullah was shot dead by a Palestinian nationalist.⁵³ The king left behind a deeply troubled country completely dependent on foreign support, with damaged relations with the Arab states and a population wherein large parts had no trust in the royal family. Few had faith in Jordan's survival.⁵⁴

King Hussein bin Talal

Hussein bin Talal was only eighteen when he formally ascended to the throne of Jordan on May 2, 1953.⁵⁵ King Hussein was deeply influenced by his grandfather's belief that Arabs had to become masters of their own fate and detach from Britain's imperialism, and was inclined to side with Arab nationalism. Besides, having witnessed King Abdullah's assassination, the worst case outcome if he diverted too far from his population's wishes had been vividly imprinted in Hussein's mind. The large Palestinian population in Jordan would forever affect King Hussein's policies, and perhaps due to having witnessed the assassination, he was during his first years at the throne far more of an Arab nationalist than King Abdullah. Hussein's top priority was to end Jordan's isolation in the Arab world, and his nationalist

⁵¹ Shlaim, "The Debate About 1948." 299–300.

⁵² Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 31–33.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 33–36.

⁵⁴ Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer?." 516.

⁵⁵ King Hussein's father, Talal bin Abdullah, was King after Abdullah's assassination, but he abdicated due to mental illness. A Regency Council exercised the constitutional powers until King Hussein came of age. Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 40, 56.

sympathies went a long way in reducing the Arab suspicion fueled by the actions of King Abdullah.⁵⁶

Jordan's attempt to realign with the Arab world, and King Hussein's interest in Arab nationalism spurred grave concerns in the minds of British policymakers who kept the Jordanian state afloat. Britain's hegemony in the Middle East had come under increasing pressure from the rising power of pan-Arabism, a supra-national and anti-imperialist Arab nationalism. It was perceived in Britain and America as a threat to Western interests in the Middle East.⁵⁷ If the so-called radical Arab nationalism was not checked, it could lead to the loss of Britain's influence in the Middle East and the loss of the Suez Canal in particular. British fear of radical Arab nationalism was further accelerated when Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954 emerged as the leader after Egypt's revolution. Under Nasser's leadership, Egypt soon embarked on a radical anti-imperialist campaign. To Britain and America, Nasser's rhetoric and popularity among all Arabs potentially threatened their interests in the rest of the Middle East.⁵⁸

Along with the vivid lesson that King Abdullah's tolerance of Israel eventually cost him his life, King Hussein saw another reason to realign Jordan with the Arab world rather than reach accommodation with Israel. The 1948 war and the consequent Palestinian refugee problem had generated an immensely difficult problem that transpired both domestic and foreign policy. Most of the refugees ended up in camps where they took action against Israel by their own means. The majority of the Palestinians who crossed the border into Israel did so to search for their lost possessions, their relatives, and to tend their fields, and only a small minority of the infiltrations was politically motivated sabotage raids against Israel.⁵⁹ However, Israel claimed cross-border incursions were financed and motivated by Arab leaders in an undeclared guerilla war, and they answered every incursion with military retaliation.⁶⁰

King Hussein realized that Israel's retaliations caused "a great deal of difficulty in terms of the internal scene in Jordan."⁶¹ In fear of provoking an attack, the king could not crack down on the Israeli reprisals, nor could he openly endorse the infiltrators. Most notably, Nasser

⁵⁶ Ibid. 65.

⁵⁷ Lazarowitz, "Different Approaches to a Regional Search for Balance". 28.

⁵⁸ Little, *American Orientalism*. 5; Waage, *Konflikt Og Stormaktspolitikk I Midtøsten*. 169, 184.

⁵⁹ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 66–67.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 68.

⁶¹ Ibid. 68.

criticized King Hussein for being unable to protect his people, and Nasser's rhetoric became widely popular among the Palestinians in Jordan. Since the army was under British command, its ineffectiveness in protecting villagers in the border areas nourished a growing mistrust of Britain among Palestinians and Jordanians alike. More importantly, the king's continued reliance on Britain also spurred a growing mistrust of him as well. When Nasser portrayed King Hussein as nothing more than a tool of the imperialists the king grew displeased that the Palestinians "treated whatever was said there [in Egypt] as the gospel truth."⁶² Moreover, Nasser had successfully propagated the Egyptian revolution as the manifestation of Arab nationalism. Nasser had assumed leadership in the Arab rivalry, and his condemnation of Hussein discredited the king's efforts to construct his own reputation as an Arab nationalist. For the time being, King Hussein's best possible solution was to allow the British commander in chief of the Arab Legion, John Bagot Glubb, to adopt strict measures to curb cross-border infiltrations.⁶³

After a particularly violent Israeli reprisal against the West Bank village of Qibya on October 15, 1953, which resulted in nearly seventy fatalities and the complete destruction of the village, King Hussein's nationalist aspirations were accelerated.⁶⁴ In response to the raid, Hussein appointed the nationalist Fawzi al-Mulki to the post of prime minister. Mulki explored options to replace Britain as Jordan's financial sponsor, and upon Mulki's request the Arab League assumed the responsibility of rebuilding Qibya and financing and arming the border villages, and granted two million pounds to the Jordanian National Guard.⁶⁵ Thus, the first seeds of an Arab option were planted. The Arab option presented a way for Jordan to extricate from Britain, but it also gave the opposition increased momentum in its criticism of Jordan's continued reliance on Britain.⁶⁶

It was a definitive step toward Arab realignment, but shortly after the appointment of Mulki as prime minister, King Hussein became alarmed by the pace of events and changed his mind. He felt that British support after all was the best available option at the time. Concerned that Nasser might gain entry to Jordan's political scene via Arab aid, Hussein concluded that such aid was a potential threat. King Hussein dismissed Mulki and disbanded the parliament in May 1954. He was willing to take drastic steps in the Arab direction even in fear of cancelled

⁶² Ibid. 69–71.

⁶³ Ibid. 71–73.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 73.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 74.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 74.

British support, but he would not allow the opposition to be in government when he disagreed with its demands. King Hussein's political aspirations had shifted from nationalist to authoritarian for the first time.⁶⁷

The Consolidation of an Opposition

During 1955, King Hussein's priorities shifted several times in his search for a middle ground between nationalism and foreign support. It was during the Baghdad Pact Crisis in 1955 that Hussein first felt the dangerous forces of the strong Arab nationalism.⁶⁸ The Baghdad Pact was a British attempt to make the Arab states side with the West in the Cold War. It was conceived in a hostile environment of anti-imperialism in the Arab world, and it faced opposition from the very beginning. Nasser denounced the pact as a British plot to thwart his leadership in the Arab world.⁶⁹ Unimpressed with Britain's Cold War reasoning, Nasser asserted that the Arab states' foremost enemy was Israel and not the distant Soviet Union. His rhetoric was already popular in Jordan, and by officially stating support for the Palestinians, his popularity on the West Bank was further accelerated. Nasser's arguments were also increasingly popular among a growing number of Jordanian nationalists who wanted to end Jordan's relationship with Britain.⁷⁰

From a British vantage point, Jordan's dynastic links with Iraq, which was the only Arab state in the Baghdad Pact, and the close ties to Britain, made Jordan a natural choice for participation in the pact. However, King Hussein's first instinct was to side with Nasser. The king was faced with Israeli retaliations on a regular basis and felt that a security pact directed against the Soviet Union was out of touch with Jordan's security concerns.⁷¹ Hussein found greater promise in Nasser's appeal for a joint Arab security pact directed against Israel. Besides, Hussein was now wholeheartedly committed to increasing the number of Jordanian officers in the Arab Legion.⁷² In 1955 King Hussein's most promising option for increasing the number of Arab officers was a revision of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty that had become subject to mounting opposition among Jordanian nationalists.⁷³ Britain declared it would only revise the increasingly unpopular treaty and reconsider the number of Arab officers if Jordan

⁶⁷ Ibid. 75.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 75.

⁶⁹ Elie Podeh, "The Struggle over Arab Hegemony after the Suez Crisis," *Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 1 (1993). 91.

⁷⁰ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 81.

⁷¹ Ibid. 78–80.

⁷² Ibid. 98.

⁷³ Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer?." 520.

joined the Baghdad Pact. This meant replacing the existing treaty with yet another one with Britain, something the king's few Arab officers disapproved of. They sought an abrogation of the Anglo-Jordanian treaty and a termination of British influence in Jordan.⁷⁴

In November 1955, Nasser welcomed the Soviet Union into the Middle East by purchasing arms from the Czech Republic. Once the Soviet Union entered the scene, Britain was desperate to secure Jordan in the Western camp. Boosted by self-confidence, Nasser launched an intense propaganda campaign against King Hussein. He appealed to the Jordanian people and stated that if Hussein were to join the Baghdad Pact, the king would "seal his own fate."⁷⁵ Hussein was impressed with Nasser's success in securing weapons from the Soviet Union, but he was troubled by Nasser's rhetoric and the Egyptian leader's popularity among Jordanians. The Jordanian people were widely supportive of Nasser and had become immensely critical of Hussein. Gradually, King Hussein started to feel that Nasser's influence posed a threat to his own authority. In spite of the king's qualms about Nasser, but in light of Britain's refusal to revise the Anglo-Jordanian defense treaty, the king gave in to public demands and abstained from joining the Baghdad Pact.⁷⁶

In response, Britain sent a persuasive delegation in a final attempt to make Jordan accede to the pact. When promised an increase of economic subsidies and a revision of the defense treaty, the king changed his mind and agreed to join. Upon learning of King Hussein's decision, the public opposition became intense and forceful, sending jitters through the Jordanian government. In fear of the powerful opposition, Prime Minister Said Mufti resigned on December 13, 1955. King Hussein was nonetheless determined that Jordan would join the pact, if only for a revision of the Anglo-Jordanian treaty. Moreover, he saw continued ties with Britain as a source of support against the forceful opposition. The new prime minister, Hazza' al-Majali who was appointed on December 15, 1955, shared the king's growing concerns over Nasser and supported continued close ties with Britain. With Jordan's ascension to the pact now imminent, the opposition rallied against Hussein. Violent riots took place all over Jordan, and the king's popularity reached a new low when the army killed demonstrators in an attempt to restore order. It became evident that Hussein's personal ambitions were completely out of touch with the interests of his people. Startled by the

⁷⁴ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 80.

⁷⁵ Podeh, "The Struggle over Arab Hegemony after the Suez Crisis." 92.

⁷⁶ Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer?." 519–520.

opposition's force and the casualties of the riots, Majali resigned after only five days in office and King Hussein eventually abstained from joining the Baghdad Pact.⁷⁷

Fumbling for a Middle Ground

What began as an attempt to give King Hussein credence as an Arab nationalist had ended in the near collapse of his regime. Hussein's reputation as a nationalist had been badly bruised by the Baghdad Pact crisis, and he desperately needed to reassert his authority. When the British Commander in chief of the Arab Legion, John Bagot Glubb in 1956 handed Hussein a paper with the names of nationalist officers he wanted fired, the opportunity to prove his worth had come. The king was acquainted with several of the officers and was outraged by Glubb's singlehanded policy.⁷⁸ Hussein for a long time had tried to Arabize his army, but Britain had turned him down every time. Firing several of the few Arab officers was out of touch with King Hussein's nationalist aspirations, and he decided to take drastic actions. He called upon some of his most trusted Arab officers and asked if they were ready to assume responsibility for the army. They all answered positively. On March 1, 1956 Hussein used the lack of ammunition and the British officers' inability to protect civilians as a pretext to fire Glubb, who was ordered to leave the country by early morning the next day.⁷⁹

Britain campaigned to make King Hussein change his mind and stated that the dismissal would have grave consequences for the economic subsidies on which Jordan was completely dependent.⁸⁰ In the United States, it was believed that if Britain revoked the subsidies, King Hussein would be forced to look to the Soviet Union for support. The Soviet Union had already entered the Middle East in Egypt, and the US observed that Britain was having trouble protecting the region's strategic benefits for the Western camp of the Cold War. As a result, the US gradually accepted taking on "new responsibilities for the security of the Middle East."⁸¹ It was only after pressure from the US that Britain's Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, abstained from revoking the economic subsidies and decided to keep the Anglo-Jordanian treaty intact.⁸² King Hussein had succeeded in a risky gamble and successfully repaired some of his damaged reputation. The American Ambassador in Jordan reported that

⁷⁷ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 83–87.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 100.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 100–103.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 102.

⁸¹ Peter L. Hahn, "Securing the Middle East: The Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2006). 39.

⁸² Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer?." 521.

“[t]he King is now hero and no longer puppet.”⁸³ Firing Glubb went a long way in aligning his rule with Arab nationalism, but the king learned that his regime could only be reconciled with nationalism as long as he controlled the events.⁸⁴

Reassured of his strengthened domestic position King Hussein in 1956 ordered Jordan’s first truly democratic elections. The result of the elections, held in October 1956, gave broad popular support to left-wing opposition parties who wanted to replace Jordan’s treaty with Britain with a treaty with Egypt and Syria. Hussein accepted the election results, as they were well suited for his ambitions of Arab realignment.⁸⁵ Suleiman Nabulsi, a strongly pro-Nasser, anti-British, and surprisingly also anti-Hashemite nationalist, was given the task of forming a government. Hussein was trying to prove that he too was an Arab nationalist, and before Nabulsi formally took office the king forestalled him and signed an agreement with Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia on the joint command of their armed forces.⁸⁶ Shortly after, the king firmly declared his nationalist inclinations when Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt and sparked the Suez War on October 29, 1956. By the outbreak of hostilities, Jordan had a defense treaty with Britain and a joint command of the armed forces with Egypt. It was a peculiar situation, but the Suez War ended before Egypt requested King Hussein to intervene. However, the fact that Jordan had prepared the army for an attack on Israel earned him credit as a true Arab nationalist, and Nasser’s criticism of him subsided.⁸⁷

Britain’s intervention in the Suez Crisis sparked a massive uprising against Jordan’s economic provider and presented a fruitful opportunity for Nabulsi to abrogate the Anglo-Jordanian treaty. A solution to Jordan’s everlasting financial burden had to be found, but faced with the anti-British atmosphere King Hussein gave in to Nabulsi’s request to replace the British subsidies with Arab finances.⁸⁸ In January 1957 Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria agreed to share the financial burden of keeping Jordan afloat. Officially, King Hussein acknowledged that the fruition of the Arab option was a big step for Arab nationalism, but he was privately worried that the Arab goodwill would not amount to action. The distance between rhetoric and action had been huge before, and there was no reason it would be less now. In the end,

⁸³ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 105; Waage, *Konflikt Og Stormaktspolitikk I Midtøsten*. 301.

⁸⁴ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 103, 105.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 112.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 113.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 119–120.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 121–122.

Hussein's misgivings were justified. Only Saudi Arabia paid up, but then only one quarterly contribution was made.⁸⁹

Britain too, worried that Jordan's new economic provider would fail in its obligations. In 1956, the previous year, Britain pleaded with the US to assume responsibility for economic aid to Jordan, but US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, had bluntly said that "the brutal fact [is] that Jordan [has] no justification as a state".⁹⁰ King Hussein too was aware that Jordan needed a more reliable source for economic support. In December 1956, he made a personal appeal for American aid, but he was turned down. American aid seemed more promising after January 5, 1957 when US President Dwight D. Eisenhower announced America's commitment to supporting states under threat of international communism. The Eisenhower Doctrine presented the king with a new opportunity to score American support. However, before King Hussein could appeal to Eisenhower, Nabulsi signed the formal termination of the Anglo-Jordanian treaty while the Arab contributions still remained uncertain. Furthermore, Nabulsi refused to let the king apply for aid through the Eisenhower Doctrine.⁹¹

King Hussein had endorsed Nabulsi's left-wing nationalist government in order to quell the criticism against him, and to some degree he allowed Nabulsi to dictate policy. Nabulsi's policies were popular and served as a means to suppress public unrest. It was King Hussein, not Jordan, who felt threatened by the opposition, and it was the king who wanted to replace the Arab subsidies with American aid, not the nationalist government. The abrogation of the Anglo-Jordanian treaty earned Nabulsi massive popularity, and Hussein was more or less isolated in his quest for American support. Fearful of subversion of his own authority and to reassert his position as the one true leader of Jordan, but also to attract attention from America, Hussein publicly accused his prime minister and the government of being bribed by the Soviet Union. It was a move intended to discredit Nabulsi, but also to declare the king's opposition to communism.⁹²

Domestic Pressure and Foreign Intervention

Nabulsi was not easily deterred. In April 1957, he dismissed several officials who were loyal to the throne. The king answered by forcing the resignation of Jordan's first democratically

⁸⁹ Ibid. 123–124.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 123.

⁹¹ Ibid. 126.

⁹² Ibid. 126–127.

elected government on the pretext that it infringed on his royal rights.⁹³ Nabulsi and the Chief of Staff of the Army, Ali Abu Nuwar, had reorganized the army to the point where its loyalty lay more with Nabulsi and Nuwar than with the king.⁹⁴ A perceived challenge to King Hussein's authority materialized on April 13, 1957 when Nuwar ordered an armored car regiment to conduct an exercise that included surrounding the royal palace. The king either interpreted the regiment's actions as an attempt to dethrone him, or he used it as a pretext to carry out his own *coup de palais* and rid his ranks of insubordinate elements.⁹⁵ Whatever reasons Hussein had for his actions, Abu Nuwar was arrested and exiled along with the other officers believed to be part of the coup. King Hussein succeeded in fending off the coup, if there ever was one, but also in securing firm American backing.⁹⁶

America's commitment to Jordan's well-being was tested already the next day when Syrian troops moved in the direction of Amman, apparently in support of the Nabulsi government. Israel had earlier contemplated taking action against Jordan should King Hussein's regime collapse.⁹⁷ The Americans realized that Israel might seize the opportunity of the present turmoil to capture the West Bank if King Hussein was dethroned and that such a move could possibly ignite a full-scale Arab-Israeli war, but Israel heeded the American warnings and stayed its hand.⁹⁸ Through covert channels the US urged King Saud in Saudi Arabia to support Hussein, and when Israel became alarmed by Iraqi troops moving toward Jordan, the US reassured that the Iraqi troop movement was just another display of support for Hussein.⁹⁹ The US had taken a definitive stance on Hussein's side.

The threat to Hussein's reign was, however, not over. Nabulsi had after all been a democratically elected prime minister, and both he and his policies were widely popular among the Jordanian public. On April 22, 1957, the large and forceful opposition assembled a National Congress of all the left-wing parties. The National Congress demanded that a new government reflecting the people's wishes be installed, that Jordan reject the Eisenhower Doctrine, and that the US Ambassador be expelled.¹⁰⁰ King Hussein viewed the National

⁹³ Ibid. 130–131.

⁹⁴ Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer?," 524; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 131.

⁹⁵ Tal, "Jordan," 114.

⁹⁶ The 'Abu Nuwar Plot' (also called the 'Zarqa Affair') is a contested subject in Jordanian history, and there are several competing accounts of the events. Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 132–139.

⁹⁷ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 115; Moshe Zak and Yosef Yaacov, "The Shift in Ben-Gurion's Attitude toward the Kingdom of Jordan," *Israel Studies* 1, no. 2 (1996). 141.

⁹⁸ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 139–140.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 136–137.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 139–140.

Congress' program as a direct challenge to his authority and on April 24, 1957 Hussein requested American support for his plans to crush the opposition with martial law and military government. Secretary of State Dulles, with President Eisenhower's consent, promised to support to the king if the Soviet Union, Syria or Israel interfered with his plans.¹⁰¹ The American administration stated that "the independence and integrity of Jordan was vital"¹⁰² and ordered the US Sixth Fleet to sail for the Eastern Mediterranean to display its commitment.¹⁰²

The initial doubts Dulles had expressed to his British counterparts had been radically altered. To reinsure King Hussein's authority and confidence as he emerged from the crisis with only limited support, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) put the king on their payroll. Through the covert channel Hussein received some 750,000 dollars directly to his pocket in 1957. The money was used to ensure the loyalty of key political figures in Jordan.¹⁰³

By April 25, 1957 King Hussein was the sole ruler of Jordan. His government was pro-American and comprised of friends loyal only to the king and his family.¹⁰⁴ Jordan's new enemy was international communism, and the US saw in Jordan a country which had chosen sides in the Cold War. Washington was eager to give King Hussein whatever support he needed, and on April 29, 1957 the president granted Jordan economic assistance under the Eisenhower Doctrine.¹⁰⁵ The amount of money far exceeded that of the British subsidies, and Hussein enjoyed far more room for maneuver than under Britain.¹⁰⁶ This enabled the king to pursue tighter alignment with the conservative states in the region and distance himself from the Soviet-backed regimes in Egypt and Syria.¹⁰⁷ Iraq and Saudi Arabia became Jordan's primary partners. The partnership of the monarchies in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Jordan was directed against Nasser's leadership in the everlasting Arab struggle for primacy, but the new course in foreign policy was also designed to demonstrate Jordan's westward orientation in the Cold War.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer?." 524.

¹⁰² Tal, "Jordan." 114.

¹⁰³ Douglas Little, "Mission Impossible: The Cia and the Cult of Covert Action in the Middle East," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 5 (2004). 684; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 147-149.

¹⁰⁴ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 141.

¹⁰⁵ Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer?." 524-525.

¹⁰⁶ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 144.

¹⁰⁷ The US and Britain often designated Egypt and Syria as reactionary, revolutionary and radical, whereas Jordan, Lebanon (and Iraq until 1958) were termed moderates. Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 144, 147-151.

¹⁰⁸ David Tal, "Seizing Opportunities: Israel and the 1958 Crisis in the Middle East," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 1 (2001). 142; Podesh, "The Struggle over Arab Hegemony after the Suez Crisis." 103.

Several Arab nationalists did not view King Hussein as compatible with Arab nationalism.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, when on February 1, 1958 Egypt and Syria merged into the United Arab Republic (UAR) to counter the moderate regimes' position in the Arab rivalry, Nasser successfully reasserted his position as the leader of the Arab world.¹¹⁰ The inter-Arab rivalry blocs were laid out between the revolutionary states backed by the Soviet Union (Egypt and Syria), and the pro-Western conservative states (Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq).¹¹¹ To counter UAR's leadership in the Arab world, and to strengthen the moderate alternative to what Washington viewed as radical Arab nationalism, King Hussein formed a union with Iraq. The two branches of the Hashemite family had long since shared a mutual interest in the survival of their family's legacy, and they proclaimed the Arab Union in Amman on February 14, 1958.¹¹² The union proved short-lived, however. Only five months later, on July 14, 1958, a brutal military coup in Baghdad dethroned the Iraqi branch of the Hashemite family. Jordan was now surrounded by revolutionary regimes, and Hussein was isolated in his own country. The public's support for Nasser and the king's weak power-base had been clearly demonstrated the preceding years. There were riots, demonstrations and rumors of a coup. In genuine fear for his life Hussein requested Western military intervention on July 16, 1958.¹¹³

Britain reluctantly answered King Hussein's request for armed intervention and asked the US for assistance. The US, however, felt that Jordan was Britain's area of interest and concentrated its efforts on Lebanon, which too was experiencing domestic turmoil. En route to Jordan, the British transport planes were denied from flying over Israel. Israel was yet again considering using Jordanian instability to its advantage, and an Israeli takeover of the West Bank was discussed.¹¹⁴ After intense American pressure, the British overflight was granted, and the Israeli government temporarily scrapped the idea of taking over the West Bank.¹¹⁵ On July 17, 1958 British paratroopers, supported with artillery and fighter aircraft, secured the airfield in Amman and began patrolling the streets of the capital.¹¹⁶ King Hussein's troubled reputation as an Arab nationalist deteriorated by the fact that it was Israel,

¹⁰⁹ Lazarowitz, "Different Approaches to a Regional Search for Balance." 46.

¹¹⁰ The partnership between Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Jordan was for a short time able to limit Egypt's influence in the Arab world, but the United Arab Republic forestalled their effort. Podeh, "The Struggle over Arab Hegemony after the Suez Crisis." 106.

¹¹¹ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 153–154.

¹¹² *Ibid.* 156.

¹¹³ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 159–161; Tal, "Jordan." 116.

¹¹⁴ Tal, "Seizing Opportunities." 142; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 163; Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 566.

¹¹⁵ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 200–201.

¹¹⁶ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 162.

the Arab enemy above all others, that granted overflight of the essential commodities of food and fuel after the UAR and Iraq had closed off their borders to Jordan.¹¹⁷

King Hussein was deeply troubled by the situation, and the US saw little hope that he could regain his authority. Since the intervention, the US Sixth Fleet was standing by to evacuate the king and his family.¹¹⁸ However, the evacuation was postponed as British soldiers in the streets of Amman gave Hussein some comfort, and the king regained his confidence as the situation cooled off.¹¹⁹ The turning point came in August 1958 when the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that called on all Arab states to respect the territorial integrity of other states.¹²⁰ The UN resolution gave legitimacy to King Hussein's rule and to Jordan's right to exist. Moreover, it enabled the king to claim that Jordan had been threatened by foreign powers rather than by his own people.¹²¹ The British troops were quietly evacuated by late October 1958, and King Hussein's handling of the crisis earned him the reputation among his Western friends and his few domestic supporters as a brave and resourceful statesman and the only Arab leader to fight the forces of communism.¹²²

Accordingly, in March 1959, King Hussein was invited to Washington where he asserted Jordan's commitment to standing up to the spread of communism. The king stated that radical Arab nationalism was a tool of Soviet communism and in his effort to deny that nationalism in Jordan, he presented his kingdom as "a bastion of regional stability and as a strategic asset of the US."¹²³ President Eisenhower accepted the king's arguments and granted nearly fifty million dollars in economic aid to Jordan. Recuperated and reinforced by his American partner, King Hussein formed a new government entirely comprised of loyalists. The government adopted King Hussein's newfound commitment to confronting communism and undertook a "more aggressive policy of confrontation with the UAR."¹²⁴

From 1960 to 1963 Jordan was largely isolated in the Arab world while the propaganda battle and tensions between the moderate and radical Arab states raged on. It eventually reached a violent stage. On August 29, 1960 the Jordanian Prime Minister and twelve other Jordanian

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 164.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 167.

¹¹⁹ Lawrence Tal, "Britain and the Jordan Crisis of 1958," *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 1 (1995): 46.

¹²⁰ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 168–169.

¹²¹ Tal, "Britain and the Jordan Crisis of 1958." 49–50; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 169.

¹²² Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 171.

¹²³ Ibid. 173.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 172–175.

officials were killed by Syrian agents.¹²⁵ King Hussein ordered the army to attack Syria, but he simultaneously engaged in secret talks with Israeli officials in an effort to hedge against exposing his western border to an Israeli capture of the West Bank. The first meeting between the two sides, which officially were enemies, took place on September 14, 1960. Hussein informed Israel of the forthcoming troop movement and asked Israel not to take advantage of the thin defense on the West Bank. Having previously contemplated action on the West Bank, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion decided that a stable Jordan served Israeli interests better than adopting more Palestinians into Israel.¹²⁶ Ben-Gurion said the king “may rest assured. You have our pledge.”¹²⁷ In the end Jordan abstained from attacking Syria, but the secret Jordan-Israel channel was eventually regularly used. In the meetings between the two sides a mutual understanding developed that Hussein’s regime was in the interest of both.¹²⁸

Jordan was still isolated from the rest of the Arab world, but some of the pressure was relieved when the UAR collapsed after a Syrian coup in 1961. However, it did not last long. On April 17, 1963, events took a turn for the worse. Egypt, along with the new revolutionary regime in Syria, and Iraq, announced the merging of the three states into the Tripartite Union.¹²⁹ The Tripartite Union had widespread support throughout the Arab world, not least among Jordan’s Palestinian population who saw the move as step toward unification of the Arab ranks against Israel. Nasser campaigned to get Jordan to join, and his arguments once more rang loud in the Jordanian population. Fueled by the evident manifestation of Arab nationalism, demonstrators and rioters called for Jordan to join.¹³⁰ The army was called in to suppress the riots, resulting in several fatalities, but eventually in a return to order. Under heavy criticism and in complete isolation from his fellow Arab statesmen and his Palestinian population, King Hussein once more disbanded parliament and assumed complete control over the government.¹³¹

Arab Realignment

Jordan’s isolation from the Arab world was broken by a mere coincidence. Ever since Israel’s creation, Israeli politicians supported a plan to divert the Jordan River from Lake Tiberias in the north to the Negev Desert in the south. All successive Israeli governments believed

¹²⁵ Ibid. 176.

¹²⁶ Zak and Yaacov, "The Shift in Ben-Gurion's Attitude toward the Kingdom of Jordan." 141–142, 152–153.

¹²⁷ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 177.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 192–201.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 189.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 190.

¹³¹ Ibid. 190–191.

Israel's survival and ability to grow depended on this crucial plan, and in 1952 the government decided to implement it.¹³² The plan had been met with criticism by the Arab states, and as tensions mounted US President Eisenhower tried to find an equitable compromise. During extensive negotiations in 1952–1955, the Unified Plan, more commonly called the Johnston Plan, took shape. The Johnston Plan allocated the water resources to each of the river's riparian states, but it failed to secure either Arab or Israeli support.¹³³

The Arab states saw Israel's intentions to divert the Jordan River as another encroachment on their rights. Under the perceived threat of Israeli expansionism, Nasser found it vital to realign the Arab states against their common adversary. However, Nasser also saw another reason for Arab realignment. Although he had triumphed in facilitating Arab unification in the Tripartite Union, he saw the aggressive and militant Ba'athist bloc in Iraq and Syria as a potential threat to Egypt's leadership in the union.¹³⁴ To contain the radical regimes, Nasser pursued tighter alignment with Jordan. Nasser's solution was to invite King Hussein to an Arab Summit. In spite of the fierce propaganda Egypt had used against King Hussein in the past, Nasser greeted the king as "a long-lost friend" at the Arab League summit meeting in Cairo in January 1964.¹³⁵

The objective of the summit was to consolidate Arab interests and put their differences aside. Three key decisions were taken in Cairo that had great impact on the Arab-Israeli conflict. The first was to divert the waters of the Jordan River before it reached Israel's border. The intention was to forestall Israel's access to the river. The second decision was to put their armies under the command of the Unified Arab Command (UAC) which was designed to deal with Israeli military actions and to protect the Arab diversion work on the Jordan River. In so doing it was declared that the Arab states had to modernize and increase their respective arsenals. The third decision was to establish the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), an umbrella organization for various Palestinian liberation groups, of which some were militant in their effort to reclaim from Israel what they regarded as their homeland. Although King Hussein privately worried of the proposals, he was finally out of isolation and he went

¹³² Moshe Gat, "The Great Powers and the Water Dispute in the Middle East: A Prelude to the Six Day War," *Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 6 (2005). 916–917.

¹³³ The Unified Plan was named after Eric Johnston, a businessman who had served as Eisenhower's envoy in facilitating the compromise. Gat, "The Great Powers and the Water Dispute in the Middle East." 918.

¹³⁴ The Ba'ath party was an aggressive and militant political movement that combined socialism with Arab nationalism. Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 62, 202.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 202.

along with them in an effort to bolster his newfound friendship with Nasser and his position in the Arab world.¹³⁶

The Cold War Game

The Cairo summit signaled that the Arab states had joined forces against Israel. Something was being done to challenge Israel, and the unification was widely popular among Jordan's Palestinian population. To King Hussein this posed a difficult challenge. Finally committed to Arab solidarity, the Palestinians' faith in Hussein went from dubious to heartfelt.¹³⁷ When Nasser invited Jordan to purchase arms from the Soviet Union, Hussein was forced to express interest. In reality, Hussein was still suspicious of Nasser and the nationalists' support of the Soviet arms offer. The king wanted to make sure that Nasser, the Soviet Union or radical Arab nationalists would never again be in a position to undermine his regime. It was only when Nasser accepted King Hussein as an equal that Hussein found a knife's edge on which he could balance the need for foreign support and nationalism. His fragile power-base had been shaken several times during his first decade on the throne, and Hussein realized he needed superpower support to preserve his rule. Luckily for King Hussein, Nasser feared Jordan might depart from the summit declaration if forced to accept Soviet arms on the spot, which would leave Egypt alone in fending off Syria's and Iraq's radicalism, and he therefore accepted Jordan's attempt to acquire Western arms.¹³⁸

The King was finally in a position to control Arab nationalism in Jordan. He had found a feasible middle ground and he did not want to leave it. King Hussein then used the Cold War to play the US into adopting a more pro-Jordan policy. Even though the arms would be used against Israel, if that became necessary, Hussein asserted that if USA could not supply the arms he needed, he would purchase them from the Soviet Union. Jordan would then be subjected to Soviet influence, which could destroy the king's moderation, and the US would be faced with widespread Soviet support for the Arab states' radicalism against Israel. However, if the US furnished the Jordanian arms request, King Hussein declared he would do all in his power to maintain a moderate position toward Israel and continue to challenge Arab nationalism and Soviet influence. His tactic paid off. In Washington, Secretary of State Dean

¹³⁶ Ibid. 203–205.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 205.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 205.

Rusk and President Johnson decided to invite King Hussein on an official visit to hear him out.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Ibid. 206.

Chapter 3: The Image of Impartiality

When the Texas Democrat Lyndon Baines Johnson ascended to the presidency of the United States upon the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, he inherited Kennedy's commitment to stop the spread of Soviet influence throughout the world. Johnson scaled up the American presence in Vietnam for that very reason, and after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964 the Vietnam War took precedence in foreign policy for the duration of Johnson's presidency.¹⁴⁰ Preoccupied with the campaign in Vietnam and cautious of becoming entangled in another area where he potentially could have to directly face the Soviet Union, Johnson's foremost issue in the Middle East was to keep the tensions in the Arab-Israeli conflict low. The tensions in the Middle East were quickly rising, however, and Johnson had to take a more direct approach in order to preserve the fragile *status quo*.

Although the administration knew that King Hussein despised the idea of Soviet arms, it also realized that he could not forever withstand Arab pressure to accept such weaponry.¹⁴¹ Arms sales gradually emerged as a necessary evil to ensure Hussein's moderation. To keep Jordan in the Western camp, to avoid Soviet subversion in the Middle East, and to ensure a stable *status quo*, Johnson had to depart from a long American tradition of abstinence from supplying arms to the Middle East. Soviet influence, which reportedly was on Jordan's threshold, was perceived as a threat to King Hussein's moderation and regional stability, in addition to being an evil in itself. However, Johnson's sympathy to Israel and the necessity of domestic popularity that Israel generated in America troubled the Jordanian arms request: American arms sales to Jordan were bound to ignite criticism from Israel and the domestic pro-Israel electorate. In the effort to preserve the *status quo*, Johnson's administration developed an image of impartiality in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

How did the administration work to ensure King Hussein's position in the Western camp of the Cold War and Jordan's position in the Arab world while at the same time protecting Israel's security? Why did the Johnson administration believe that direct arms sales to the Middle East could protect the *status quo*?

¹⁴⁰ Rusk, *As I Saw It*. 384–387; Lazarowitz, "Different Approaches to a Regional Search for Balance." 26.

¹⁴¹ Telegram 6944 from London to State Department, April 25, 1964, United States National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NARA), Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State (hereafter RG 59), Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964–1966: Political and Defense, (hereafter CFPF, 1964–1966: PD) Box 1667, Folder, DEF 19 JORDAN.

Kennedy's Legacy and Johnson's Ambitions in the Middle East

The Kennedy administration had initially paid little attention to Jordan. The reason was in part that the Israel-Jordan relationship was decent. Secret contacts between King Hussein and Israeli officials had emerged from the Tripartite Union crisis in 1963 the two sides had reached the conclusion that a stable Jordan was in both Israel's and naturally in King Hussein's interest.¹⁴² The meeting of minds had developed into a fragile, but stable *de facto* peace between Jordan and Israel.¹⁴³ President Kennedy was evidently aware that King Hussein's moderation ensured low tensions in the Arab-Israeli dispute, and in 1962 he stated that Jordan was "the key to the precarious stability in the Middle East."¹⁴⁴

Nonetheless, Kennedy's primary focus in the Middle East had been to reverse Soviet influence where it already had found a solid footing, particularly in Egypt. The decent relations Kennedy cultivated with Nasser enabled him to extend informal security guarantees to Israel and in 1962 also to authorize the first ever direct US arms sale to Israel. Kennedy had authorized Israel's purchase of Hawk surface-to-surface missiles in the hope that it would absolve Israel's interest in developing atomic weapons at the nuclear reactor it had built with French help in Dimona in the Negev Desert.¹⁴⁵ Although the necessity of the Hawk missiles was questionable, it was a first step toward a decisive shift in the US Middle East arms policy.¹⁴⁶ Israel had agreed to American inspections of the Dimona reactor as a precondition for the Hawks, but during Johnson's presidency Israel postponed such agreements and used it as leverage to score more arms from the US. Robert W. Komer, a stay-over from Kennedy's administration and one of President Johnson's key Middle East advisors on the National Security Council, saw a lesson in the Hawk sale that Israel would have to pay a strategic or political prize for future arms sales.¹⁴⁷

The radical Arab states' close ties to Moscow had already introduced the Cold War dimension to the Middle East, and in the eventually tense atmosphere of the Arab-Israeli conflict Johnson was faced with rising Israeli interest for an American security guarantee and direct arms sales. Accommodating arms requests and publicly declaring that the US would come to

¹⁴² Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 226–227.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 227–228.

¹⁴⁴ Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963–68." 528.

¹⁴⁵ Little, *American Orientalism*. 94-96; Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948: A "Special Relationship"?", *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 2 (1998). 236.

¹⁴⁶ David Tal, "Symbol Not Substance? Israel's Campaign to Acquire Hawk Missiles, 1960–1962," *The International History Review* 22, no. 2 (2000). 304.

¹⁴⁷ Abraham Ben-Zvi, "Influence and Arms: John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and the Politics of Arms Sales to Israel, 1962–1966," *Israel Affairs* 10, no. 1-2 (2004). 44.

Israel's aid would only make the Soviet Union declare the same for the Arab states. Thus, the US preferred to keep Israel at a safe, but minimum distance.¹⁴⁸ However, if the US did not give Israel at least some arms, the administration ran the risk of domestic criticism and believed it would inadvertently drive Israel to develop nuclear weapons. To simultaneously preserve strategic interests in the Arab states, while continuing the close relationship with Israel, the Johnson administration instead tried to preserve a "military and political balance" in the Arab-Israeli dispute.¹⁴⁹

Increased Defense Needs

The military balance was challenged as product of the Cairo Summit. Massive Soviet arms shipments were delivered to Egypt and Syria, and Johnson almost immediately faced Israeli requests for arms. In January 1964, Israel's ambassador to the US, Avraham Harman, declared that the unification of the Arab armies posed a threat not only to Israel's access to the Jordan River, but to its very existence. Israel intended to strengthen its defenses to face such threats, and the first move was to request a purchase of tanks directly supplied from the US. The reasoning was that Egypt's recent purchase of tanks from the Soviet Union, according to Harman, had put Israel at both a qualitative and quantitative disadvantage.¹⁵⁰

The State Department cautioned that a direct arms sale to Israel would cause serious repercussions for the American relationships with the Arab states.¹⁵¹ The State Department based its caution on a report from the US Embassy in Amman which stated that the trend of anti-American sentiment in Jordan was "greater than we have witnessed the last several years."¹⁵² The embassy reported there was a growing "feeling among certain elements, following the Arab Summit Conference, that Jordan no longer need depend solely upon [the] United States ... for economic and military assistance and that Arab ... alternatives to American aid will now be forthcoming."¹⁵³ In another report the embassy declared that "[w]e most strongly believe the United States would seriously jeopardize its interest in Jordan as well as its interest in the area as a whole if we became a major supplier of military equipment

¹⁴⁸ Candace Karp, *Missed Opportunities : Us Diplomatic Failures and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1967* (Claremont, Calif: Regina Books, 2005). 185.

¹⁴⁹ Lazarowitz, "Different Approaches to a Regional Search for Balance." 25.

¹⁵⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, January 3, 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XVIII *Arab-Israeli Dispute 1964-67* (hereafter Vol. 18), Document 3.

¹⁵¹ Rusk to President Johnson, January 16, 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 9.

¹⁵² Airgram A-409 from Embassy Amman to State Department, March 4, 1964, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964-1966: PD, Box 2390, Folder, POL JORDAN-US.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

to Israel.”¹⁵⁴ Arab nationalism already posed a serious challenge to US-Arab relations, even without American arms in Israel. Johnson’s special advisor for national security, McGeorge Bundy, recommended that Johnson postpone a final decision: “Our current problem is simply that the Arabs are in an excited frame of mind”.¹⁵⁵

If US tanks arrived in Israel while the Arabs already were excited, Bundy feared it might damage the US-Arab relations on which strategic interests depended. Anti-American sentiment was not the only reason Bundy saw for postponing an answer to Israel’s tank request: “[I]f we hastily give in on something as difficult as the tank deal in March, I hate to think what we will be asked for between now and November.”¹⁵⁶ Elections were to be held in November 1964, and the pro-Israel pressure on the administration was by the spring rather low. However, a tank deal could be fruitful to win the important pro-Israel votes if the pressure were to increase closer to election day.¹⁵⁷ The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) agreed with Bundy and did not see any imbalance in the strength of the combined Arab and Israeli military forces. To Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs even questioned if the Unified Arab Command (UAC) would be able to work at all: “The serious political differences and jealousies of the Arabs make effective combined military action against Israel highly unlikely.”¹⁵⁸

At a National Security Council (NSC) meeting in March 1964 the issues of the Israeli arms request were discussed. The temporary conclusion was that *if* the US would sell tanks to Israel, it had to find ways to counteract Arab reactions and resentment.¹⁵⁹ Robert W. Komer, Middle East expert for the National Security Staff, though personally sympathetic to Israel, felt that continued Israeli pressure on America would have negative long-term consequences for both parties:

In fact ... Israel seems to have quite deliberately been seeking step-by-step to develop the kind of relationship with us (overt security guarantee, military aid, joint planning) which will compromise our relationship with the Arabs. No doubt the Israelis think that this will be a stronger deterrent to Arab pressures. But in my view it is a most short-sighted policy. The Arabs already regard us as so pro-Israeli that further steps will not add much. What they will do, however, is to force the Arabs to react, by squeezing our base and oil interests, and by moving ever closer to Moscow. This will increase the threat to Israel far more than the

¹⁵⁴ Airgram A-419 from Embassy Amman to State Department, March 11, 1964, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2390, Folder POL JORDAN-US.

¹⁵⁵ Bundy to Johnson, March 8 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 27.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff to McNamara, March 12, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 28.

¹⁵⁹ National Security Action Memorandum No. 290, March 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 32.

reassurance gained from making public what we already do privately. Thus Israeli policy harms rather than serves US-Israeli interests.¹⁶⁰

These problems became ever more pressing when King Hussein arrived as invited to request direct American arms sales with money from the Unified Arab Command (UAC). In a meeting with Hussein, Secretary of Defense McNamara stated that the US was principally against selling arms to the Middle East, but to prevent the king from accepting the Soviet arms offer, McNamara said the US was willing to send representatives to Jordan to research Jordan's defense needs.¹⁶¹ When King Hussein stressed that Israel had the military potential to destroy Jordan in 48 hours, the Middle East expert from the State Department's Office for Near East Affairs (NEA), Philips Talbot, interjected that "an increase of several million of arms on one side would almost certainly lead to an increase of an equivalent or a greater amount on the other."¹⁶² Still unwilling to supply arms to either side of the conflict, McNamara could only say that the US was willing to talk about arms sales.¹⁶³

In a later meeting, President Johnson told King Hussein that he was as much the Arabs' friend as Kennedy had been, and he did not question the king's Western orientation. However, Johnson said the amount of help Jordan received from other sources than the US would affect Congress' attitude to continued economic and military aid.¹⁶⁴ King Hussein was acutely aware of the potential loss of American financial support if he accepted Soviet weapons. The Johnson administration was equally aware of the king's inability to withstand Arab pressure to accept Soviet arms without risking domestic opposition. Also, the administration was aware that Jordan's partnership with the US would be criticized if Jordan's economic subsidizer supplied arms to Israel.¹⁶⁵ Johnson urged Hussein to hold his ground while the Jordanian arms request was under discussion.¹⁶⁶

The Jordanian arms request added another dimension to Israel's request. The CIA gave their estimates of a US tank sale to Israel:

The atmosphere of US-Arab relations, which has been relatively good for the past few years, has recently become clouded by a resurgence of Arab suspicions that the US has a pro-Israel

¹⁶⁰ Komer to Feldman, March 23, 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 33.

¹⁶¹ Memorandum of Conversation, April 15, 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 40.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963-68." 530.

¹⁶⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, April 15, 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 41.

¹⁶⁵ Davies to Jernegan, April 3, 1964, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964-1966: PD, Box 2388, Folder POL 15-1 JORDAN.

¹⁶⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, April 15, 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 41.

and anti-Arab bias. These suspicions would be greatly increased in scope and intensity were the US to furnish 500 tanks to Israel.¹⁶⁷

The CIA concurred with the conclusions drawn by the State Department and the Defense Department:

The U.S. is sympathetic to Israel's growing need for modernization of its armor and would find it advantageous from a production and balance of payments point of view to sell 500 tanks to Israel but: (a) Israel's need is not immediate; (b) the political cost to the U.S. of meeting this need directly would be too great; and (c) there are alternate possibilities for meeting Israeli needs via European suppliers which offer promise.¹⁶⁸

A direct US arms sale to Israel was turned down in June 1964, but the administration agreed to help Israel acquire tanks from Europe under deep secrecy.¹⁶⁹ The choice fell on the Federal Republic of Germany through which Israel could purchase one hundred and fifty American-made tanks.¹⁷⁰ To counteract Israeli complaints over the negative reply, Komer advised Johnson to inform Israel's Prime Minister Levi Eshkol of the strategic aspect of US Middle East policy:

*The one thing we ask of Israel is not to keep trying to force us to an all-out pro-Israeli policy. We ask this not just because a balanced policy is essential strategically to keep the Soviets out of the [Middle East], and economically because of oil but because it is as much in Israel's interest as ours. If we choose Israel's side so openly that the Arabs form alliances with Moscow, Israel loses just as much as we. Our present policy gives the Arabs an incentive not to swing too far away from the West. This is simple common sense.*¹⁷¹

However, Johnson decided to compensate Israel for the loss of the political benefit a direct arms sale symbolized, by informally reiterating the US guarantee of Israel's security:

It is ... the US which is expected ... to come to Israel's defense if attacked. This, of course, is simple truth—since 1950 it has been a fixed tenet of our policy, reiterated by every President, to deter and if necessary cope with military aggression against Israel. We have also, through both public and private means, been Israel's strongest financial backers.... I am as firmly behind this policy as my predecessors.¹⁷²

Johnson further emphasized that the US “felt it necessary to maintain at *least an appearance of balance between* Israel and the Arabs, because of our wide interests in the area and desire not to thrust Arabs into [the] arms of Moscow.”¹⁷³ In effect, Komer and Johnson had bridged the gap between the containment policy and Israel's security, and explicitly enunciated the terms of the American strategic impartiality. Robert Komer knew that in reality the

¹⁶⁷ Special National Intelligence Estimate, April 15, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 42.

¹⁶⁸ Memorandum for the Standing Group, undated, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 47.

¹⁶⁹ Memorandum for the Record, April 30, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 49.

¹⁷⁰ Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963–68." 531.

¹⁷¹ Komer to President Johnson, May 28, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 63. Original italics.

¹⁷² President Johnson to Feldman, May 15, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 55.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* Original italics.

administration's Middle East policy served to protect Israel's security in any case. To Israel's Minister of Defense, Shimon Peres, Komer disclosed the truth about American evenhanded policy.¹⁷⁴ He said US impartiality in the Middle East was a myth: "[I]f one looked at actions, not words, it was clear that from 1947 on our policy had basically favored Israel."¹⁷⁵ The purpose of publicly stating that the US was evenhanded in the Middle East was simply to allow for continued sway over Arab leaders. This, Komer told Peres, was in their countries' mutual interest as it would limit Soviet involvement (which primarily concerned the US) and Soviet weapons (which primarily concerned Israel, but for that reason also concerned the US). Komer asserted that it was Soviet influence and weapons that were the real threat to Israel, and he believed the US could ensure Israel's security, contain communism and stall the arms race in the Middle East by forwarding an image of impartiality.¹⁷⁶

A Crisis in the Making

The fact that the US generally sympathized with Israel did not mean the time was ripe for direct arms sales. The general consensus in Johnson's administration was that a direct arms sale to Israel in all likelihood would damage both the image of impartiality and the strategic interests in the Arab states. Under continuous pressure to accept Soviet weapons, King Hussein's commander in chief of the Jordanian army, Brigadier Amer Kammash, arrived in Washington and emphasized the urgent need for a positive reply to the Jordanian arms request. Kammash underscored that Jordan would be forced to accept Soviet weapons if the US could not furnish them.¹⁷⁷ Already aware of King Hussein's concerns about Soviet influence, there was some speculation in the administration that Kammash and Hussein were bluffing by saying "put up or shut up" and implying that Jordan *would* accept Soviet weapons if the US did not offer promise.¹⁷⁸ However, the dangers of calling a bluff that turned out to be honest had dangerous consequences, and the question had to be answered quickly: Kammash reported Soviet equipment to be ready for delivery to Jordan on short notice.¹⁷⁹

King Hussein had recently escaped isolation, and Talbot and the rest of the NEA believed the king would do everything in his power to retain his position in the Arab world. The NEA did

¹⁷⁴ Memorandum for the Record, undated, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 69.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Talbot to Rusk, July 22, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 78; Komer to Bundy, July 28, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 80.

¹⁷⁸ Telegram 30 from State Department to Embassy Amman, July 17, 1964, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2390, Folder POL JORDAN-US.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

not believe Hussein was bluffing and informed Rusk that “[i]f we are unwilling to provide the equipment, Soviet equipment will be delivered either through [Egypt] or directly from the Soviet Union.”¹⁸⁰ However, upon hearing the extent of Kammash’s request, which included fighter aircraft, Talbot balked: “Should we fail to hold the line on sale of supersonic aircraft and other sophisticated hardware to Jordan, we would be subject to pressures from the other Arab states and Israel.”¹⁸¹ Selling arms to a conflict area did not serve the *status quo*, Talbot argued. Fighter aircraft were out of the question for Talbot, and he agreed with officials in the Department of Defense that Jordan be persuaded to “concentrate on modernization rather than expansion of their forces.”¹⁸² If persuasion would not bear fruit, the Department of Defense reluctantly approved that the US should be willing to help facilitate Jordan’s acquisition of British fighters, but only if there was no doubt that Jordan would accept Soviet aircraft.¹⁸³

The State Department held that “we must continue to hold the line and ... [be firm] with Jordan in order to avert a major crisis in our overall relations with the Arabs and Israel.”¹⁸⁴ The State Department was willing to allow Jordan to purchase ground equipment only. The Department of Defense contrarily opted for Jordan to purchase fighters, and it did not agree that the firm line was the best course of action. Both departments made all possible sales contingent on the UAC making the funds available to Jordan, which they in any case doubted.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, Komer launched another issue into the equation: “[T]hese arms are for [the] announced purpose of backing [an] Arab scheme to divert Jordan headwaters—can we be in [the] position of selling arms to support action we oppose?”¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless, Komer suggested that Hussein should not be given a “flat turndown” yet.¹⁸⁷

In late July 1964, the Joint Chiefs gave their assessments of the Jordanian arms request. As regards the State Department’s unwillingness to sell aircraft to Jordan, the JCS stated that the “basis for the State Department position is not known; it does not appear to be consistent with the decisions of this type for other Arab countries.”¹⁸⁸ The fact was that Lebanon, Libya and Saudi Arabia had already purchased fighter aircraft from the US. On that basis the Joint

¹⁸⁰ Talbot to Rusk, July 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 78.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Read to Rusk, July 24, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 79.

¹⁸⁵ Komer to Bundy, July 28, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 80.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff to McNamara, July 30, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 81.

Chiefs did not have any serious misgivings about selling equivalent numbers and quality to Jordan and saw little reason not to sell fighters to King Hussein.¹⁸⁹

The State Department informed the US Embassy in Amman on August 4, 1964 that the ambassador should reluctantly approve an arms sale to Jordan, but he should also inform King Hussein that the US was “deeply disturbed that Jordan’s prospects for economic self-reliance may be jeopardized by the threat of new defense burdens.”¹⁹⁰ Except for the exclusion of fighters, Rusk gave American assurances that Jordan could buy tanks and other ground force equipment directly from USA. In the end, the Department of State and the Department of Defense found a middle ground. Jordan was allowed to buy tanks directly from the US, and in the expected event that Hussein would pressure for fighters, Rusk authorized the embassy in Amman to say that the US was willing to research the need for replacing Jordan’s fighter aircraft, and even in helping facilitate such a sale, but from Western Europe and not the US.¹⁹¹

Rusk appealed to the king’s opposition to communism to make King Hussein settle for the ground force package, and asked if he would “expect Soviet assistance if [he] were overthrown by internal coup or if Jordan [was] attacked from outside?”¹⁹² King Hussein did not believe the Soviet Union had any interest in his regime, and he had little interest in communism.¹⁹³ His motives were the preservation of his regime, but without distancing himself from Nasser and the Palestinians in Jordan. When Hussein had joined the Cairo Summit declaration, he had done so not because he believed in confrontation with Israel but because it was in accord with the wishes of his large Palestinian population. Although the king privately still believed in moderation toward Israel, he could no longer afford to stand alone, neither in the Arab world nor in his own country. Joining the Cairo Summit declaration, the US Embassy in Amman reported, “has paid off in terms of possibly the greatest popular support for his regime, especially among Palestinians”.¹⁹⁴ To ensure his newfound popularity, Hussein had to comply with the UAC’s demands, and he stressed that without fighters the Arab pressure on him to accept Soviet weaponry would not subside.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ State Department to Embassy Amman, August 4, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 82.

¹⁹¹ State Department to Embassy Amman, August 4, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 82; Levey, “United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963–68.” 534.

¹⁹² State Department to Embassy Amman, August 8, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol 18, Document 84.

¹⁹³ Tal, “Jordan.” 108–109.

¹⁹⁴ Airgram A-223 from Embassy Amman to State Department, November 11, 1964, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2388, Folder POL 15-1 JORDAN.

¹⁹⁵ State Department to Embassy Amman, August 12, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 88.

The administration had to review the issues again. In mid-August 1964, the CIA stated that a “US sale [to Jordan] of all or most of the requested equipment, while it would lessen Arab resentments concerning alleged US favoritism toward Israel, would impair US ability to check the escalation of the Arab-Israeli arms race.”¹⁹⁶ Limiting the arms race was the American key to preserving the *status quo*. However, the CIA underlined that a US sale to Jordan was a far lesser evil than a Jordanian army and air force equipped by Egypt or the Soviet Union.¹⁹⁷

The solution was to reluctantly furnish Jordan’s arms request and hope that Israel would understand that a Soviet-equipped Jordanian army was a far more real threat than controlled amounts of American weapons in Jordan. Rusk asked the US Ambassador in Amman, Robert G. Barnes, to inform King Hussein that the US was willing to take another look at fighters.¹⁹⁸ However, Rusk underlined that the administration needed time to make a “decision ... with such obviously far-reaching implications”¹⁹⁹ Rusk’s solution was to use the time to persuade Israel to understand that the outcome was actually in Israel’s best interest. Under the prospect of losing Jordan to the Soviet Union, even in light of the escalating Arab-Israeli tensions, the US was willing to “consider any and all types [of] US or other Western aircraft.”²⁰⁰ Rusk was in principle willing to sell American (though preferably European) fighters in addition to the ground force equipment, but the administration was acutely aware that Israel would try to score an arms deal of its own once the gates to the American arsenal were opened to the Middle East.²⁰¹

The Lesser Evil

In addition to the impression of open gates to the American arsenal and the desire to associate the US closer through a direct arms sale, a perception of hostile encirclement had taken deep roots in Israel’s assessment of the Middle East.²⁰² The unification of the Arab world was troubling enough, but King Hussein’s adherence to it accelerated concerns in Israel. Uncertain of the sincerity of the king’s moderation, Israel believed military deterrence would keep the

¹⁹⁶ Special National Intelligence Estimate, August 13, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 91.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ State Department to Embassy Amman, August 20, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 92.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ State Department to Embassy Amman, August 20, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 92; Levey, “United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963–68.” 533.

²⁰² Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 214.

Arab states at bay.²⁰³ When the Federal Republic of Germany cancelled the delivery of more than half of the tanks in the deal that the US had facilitated in June 1964, Israel had yet another incentive and more solid arguments for a direct US arms sale.²⁰⁴

Israel requested the US to supply the remaining tanks directly, but Rusk joined Komer's speculation that the new Israeli request was born from the pending Jordanian request and not from Germany's cancellation. However, since Israel did not yet have official knowledge of the Jordanian request, Rusk realized that Israel sought to score an arms deal of its own.²⁰⁵

Komer informed Johnson of the dilemmas:

We've agreed in principle to some staggered arms sales to Jordan so long as the Arab kitty [the UAC] can finance them, but have stalled on the key item—supersonic aircraft. Our fear is that if we sell supersonics to Jordan for an announced Arab buildup against Israel's diversion scheme, we'll come under acute Israeli and US Zionist pressure to sell arms directly to Israel too. In fact, our whole aid program to Jordan might come under attack. If we get into overt arms sales to Israel, then all the Arabs may turn against us, and Jordan may have to accept Soviet and UAR arms anyway.²⁰⁶

The issue was acute. No option seemed attractive, neither to Komer nor to Rusk. Nonetheless, Komer recommended that Johnson should approve a ground force package while keeping fighters off the table, believing that the Arab rearmament against Israel would “fall apart in time (as it has before).”²⁰⁷ However, Komer gave his tacit blessing to a Department of Defense and State Department contingency plan: to allow King Hussein to buy one squadron of US fighters but only if there was no doubt about of the sincerity that Hussein actually intended to accept Soviet aircraft.²⁰⁸ On February 1, 1965 Rusk recommended to Johnson that the US should accommodate the Jordanian arms request. Although still keeping fighters off the table, the US should help Jordan explore European providers and only offer a direct sale of aircraft if absolutely necessary.²⁰⁹ More importantly, Rusk stressed the need to inform Israel in order to “abort its strong adverse reaction.”²¹⁰

Rusk was suspicious that Israel sought to strike an arms deal of its own and realized that Israel would strongly oppose any arms sale to any Arab state in the rising tide of Arab unity. To find a way to counter Israel's reaction to the Jordanian arms sale which most observers

²⁰³ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 224.

²⁰⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, September 23, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 95.

²⁰⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, December 31, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 117.

²⁰⁶ Komer to President Johnson, January 21, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 124.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Rusk to President Johnson, February 1, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 129.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

now accepted the necessity of, the National Security Council met on February 1, 1965 to discuss the issues.²¹¹ Under-Secretary of State George W. Ball assured that any course of action was bound to a series of disadvantages. If the US were to withhold fighters, Jordan would be forced to accept Soviet aircraft: “Thus, no matter what we do, we will contribute to the arms race in the Middle East.”²¹² The realization that arms would arrive in Jordan either way led the administration to conclude that controlled delivery of US weapons was preferred. Besides, the Joint Chiefs stated that another twenty fighters to the combined Arab arsenal would not upset the Arab-Israeli military balance. The CIA concurred and stressed that the risk of not including planes in the Jordan arms package would be too great because it would unquestionably mean a Jordanian air force equipped with Soviet fighters.²¹³

Johnson understood the arguments in favor of a US aircraft sale to Jordan, but he felt that Jordan should be persuaded to accept European suppliers.²¹⁴ The conclusion was that the marginally lesser of several evils was for the US to sell only tanks and ground force equipment directly and help Jordan acquire aircraft from Europe.²¹⁵

Avoiding Compensation

Israel was informed of the necessity to furnish the Jordanian arms request: “We believe that although Hussein recognizes that acceptance of the Soviet/ [Egyptian] alternative could be the beginning of [the] end for his regime, he would do it rather than take [the] immediate consequences of isolation from the rest of the Arab world.”²¹⁶ The State Department argued that an American arms sale would secure King Hussein in the Western camp and grant American leverage on the placement of Jordan’s army, which was in Israel’s interest. Israel was asked to keep the information secret and inform its friends in Washington in order to clear the administration’s domestic flank. After all, an American arms sale to Jordan was the least unattractive alternative from both an American and an Israeli viewpoint.²¹⁷

Israel was not impressed with the US arguments. Prime Minister Eshkol said that the proposed armaments would transform Jordan’s army from defensive to offensive, that the tanks would pose a direct threat to Tel Aviv, and that the overall result would be a shift in the

²¹¹ Notes of the 544th Meeting of the NSC, February 1, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 130.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, February 1, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 131.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

balance of power to a level Israel could not accept.²¹⁸ Under-Secretary of State Ball noted that Eshkol “grossly” overestimated the result of a modernized Jordanian army and argued that it was

[B]etter for Israel’s security and peace of area for some arms to be given to Jordan on controlled basis by [a] friend of Israel [rather than] on uncontrolled basis by [the] Soviet Union... We presumed Israel regarded prospect of uncontrolled arming of Jordan by Soviets more ominous than [the] situation we contemplated.²¹⁹

In order to counteract Israel’s opposition and in hoping to avoid a compensatory arms sale to Israel, the Jordanian arms package was revised. With support from the State Department and Department of Defense, the Joint Chiefs and the CIA, Special Advisor Komer recommended that the US should sell Jordan a minimum package. The tanks should be inferior to the ones that the US had helped Israel acquire from Germany, and the fighters would be European.²²⁰ The package was believed to sufficient to “keep Hussein from jumping the reservation,” meaning it would be enough to enable the king to comply with the UAC and enough to bolster his domestic popularity, but less than justifying a compensatory sale to Israel.²²¹ Komer recommended the US to take a hard line on Israel’s attempt to bring about an arms sale.²²² The hardline approach could be successful if time was allowed to play its part, but “our dilemma is that if we stall any longer we may lose Hussein.”²²³ To Komer, the real American goal was “to get through this new crisis without: (1) sacrificing Israel’s security or getting a domestic black eye for appearing to do so; (2) ruining our relations with the Arabs—along with all this would cost us; (3) letting the Soviets score another major gain in the Near East.”²²⁴

When Talbot informed King Hussein in Amman that the US, in spite of deep misgivings, had agreed to sell tanks and other ground force equipment to Jordan, he was instructed to use every effort to dissuade the king from fighters.²²⁵ American fighters were off the table, but if the king pressured for it, Talbot was instructed to reluctantly acquiesce to European jets. More importantly, Talbot was instructed to inform Hussein that this could very well force the US to make arms sales to Israel.²²⁶ Upon learning of the American reluctance to sell fighters,

²¹⁸ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, February 6, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 137.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Komer to President Johnson, February 6, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 138.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ State Department to the Embassy in Beirut, February 6, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 139.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

Hussein bluntly said that if European aircraft could suffice, he would not have troubled the US with a request.²²⁷ He also complained that the proposed tanks were inferior to the ones Israel had purchased from Germany.²²⁸ The ever-pragmatic Komer read Talbot's report and launched another possible solution: to "sweeten the Jordan package" by making available better tanks.²²⁹ He also agreed with Talbot's suggestion that Jordan should be allowed to purchase twenty fighters.²³⁰

Only days earlier, news of the proposed American arms sale to Jordan was leaked, and the opposition criticized the Johnson administration for its new policy in the Middle East. Komer believed Israel had leaked the news of the Jordan arms sale in an effort to force the administration to sell weaponry to Israel as well. However, Komer was not deterred and presented yet another new solution.²³¹ To counter Israel's complaints against the Jordanian arms sale while still preventing King Hussein from accepting Soviet arms, Komer argued for "just enough sweetening to show Hussein that we're serious and 10 days reconsideration in Washington (while we beat up Israelis)."²³² Komer suggested that the US put on "a great show of indignation" after Israel's leaking of the Jordan arms package and then "go back at them hard" to have Israel acquiesce to the Jordan arms package in an effort to clear Johnson's domestic flank.²³³ The ten days Komer had suggested would in the end turn into a month of difficult negotiations.

Persuasion and Stagnation

Komer was given the uneasy task of getting Israel on board with the Jordanian arms sale. On February 10, 1965 Komer got the talking points for his coming mission to Tel Aviv. Komer was instructed to stress to the Israeli government that the reason for the arms sale "from the outset has been primarily aimed at minimizing the threat to Israeli security and area stability, not reverse."²³⁴ Komer was asked to tell Israel that the US had "no independent interest in Jordan" and that "[o]ur subsidies to it ... have been primarily designed to maintain an independent Arab kingdom, not under hostile domination, along Israel's longest and most

²²⁷ Embassy Amman to State Department, February 7, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 141.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ Komer to President Johnson, February 9, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 143.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ Memorandum for Komer, February 10, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 146.

vulnerable frontier.”²³⁵ In case the Israeli government did not accept the US viewpoint, and to make it acquiesce to the Jordanian arms sale, Komer was instructed to convey the impression that the US could consider direct sales of arms to Israel at some unspecified time in the future.²³⁶

On top of Israel’s opposition to the Jordanian arms package was another difficult problem for American policymakers. Israel was quietly signaling intentions to strike against the Arab work sites on the Jordan River to secure its share of the water. Israel was sounding out the American position in case a preemptive strike became necessary. The US maintained that the Johnston Plan served as the basis for the American position, and that justifying an Israeli strike would be extremely difficult unless “Israel’s basic water interests [were] affected and all other resources [were] exhausted.”²³⁷ The State Department’s Middle East expert group, the NEA, believed that the Arab diversion scheme would unlikely be able to threaten Israel’s share of the Jordan River in any case, and therefore recommended the administration to only offer a compensatory arms sale to Israel if it agreed to actively support the arms sale to Jordan, and to not take preemptive measures against the Arab diversion work on the Jordan River.²³⁸

In addition, the NEA recommended that Israel agree to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections of its nuclear power plant at Dimona. Nuclear non-proliferation was an important issue for Johnson’s administration, but Israel’s unwillingness to allow American inspections, which it had agreed to as a condition for the Hawk sale in 1962, was seen as disruptive for regional stability in the Middle East.²³⁹ Israel, however, believed that the ambiguity of Dimona’s capabilities served as a deterrent against the Arab states. The US felt that Israel was taking unnecessary risks and that its reluctance to accept international inspections could force the Arab states to align ever closer to the Soviet Union:²⁴⁰

[W]e believe that Nasser’s fear of a developing Israeli nuclear power may drive him to a choice between accelerating the [Egyptian] military buildup or a desperate pre-emptive

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Circular Telegram 1476 from the State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, February 11, 1965. NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 33-1 JORDAN.

²³⁸ Circular Telegram 1476 from the State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, February 11, 1965, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 33-1 JORDAN; Briefing Memorandum by Talbot, February 13, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 149.

²³⁹ Briefing Memorandum by Talbot, February 13, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 149; Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 569–570.

²⁴⁰ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, March 19, 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 31.

attack. Either of these choices would have the gravest effects on the security of Israel. We think it plain that any possible deterrent value ... is trivial compared to these risks.²⁴¹

The US was also suspicious of the reactor's potential for producing nuclear weapons and gradually came to regard a direct arms sale to Israel as a means to dissuade its interests in a nuclear deterrent.²⁴²

Meanwhile, Komer pressed ahead in Tel Aviv. The firm line met heavy resistance. It dawned on Komer that the US would have to bait Israel with arms sales to get the country on board before King Hussein abandoned the US. He summed up the third round of talks with a bleak outlook on the prospect of withholding weaponry from Israel:

[E]verything I've heard here tends to fortify my conviction that to sell arms to Jordan without at least doing the same for Israel will generate a major crisis in our relations. Moreover, their acute worry over the general deterioration of their security position (of which Jordan arms is only a part) is gradually generating a pre-emptive psychology. It could even lead at some point to a decision to go nuclear if this appeared to be the only way to maintain a deterrent edge.²⁴³

In his report to Washington on February 16, 1965, Komer recommended that the US should keep the Jordan arms package at the present level, meaning no US aircraft and no advanced tanks, while subtly stating that the US would consider direct arms sales to Israel in the future.²⁴⁴ Contrary to Komer's recommendation, Rusk asserted that any compensation to Israel should be "balanced assistance" and that anything more would signal that the US was buying Israel's compliance with the Jordanian arms sale.²⁴⁵ On February 18, 1965 King Hussein accepted American assistance in finding European fighters, and the need for a direct sale of US fighters to Jordan suddenly disappeared.²⁴⁶ However, Rusk agreed that the US could sell twenty fighters to Jordan by 1969 if Hussein was unsuccessful in finding aircraft in Europe.²⁴⁷ Since the prospect of American fighters in Jordan was assigned to future negotiations, Israel should be willing to accept the ground force package, and Rusk declared that arms sales to Israel would only be considered in the face of "a disproportionate buildup of arms on the Arab side."²⁴⁸

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 575–576.

²⁴³ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, February 15, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 150.

²⁴⁴ Komer to President Johnson, February 16, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 152.

²⁴⁵ Memorandum for the Files, February 18, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 153.

²⁴⁶ Embassy Amman to State Department, February 19, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 154.

²⁴⁷ Rusk to President Johnson, February 19, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 155.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

Nonetheless, Israel still maintained that the proposed Jordanian ground force package justified an American arms sale to Israel. Komer was sent on a second mission to Tel Aviv. President Johnson personally gave the instructions for the second round of negotiations. To counter Israel's complaints about the Jordanian arms sale, Komer should relay Johnson's views:

It is my own judgment, buttressed by those of all of my advisers, that if we do not help King Hussein out of his dilemma, Jordan will be compelled to accept much larger quantities of Soviet arms. If this occurs, we have told King Hussein we will have to cut off all aid. The almost certain result in our judgment will be Nasserite domination of Jordan. Then Israel will be hemmed in by a hostile Arab ring, with Soviet arms on the East Bank.²⁴⁹

Johnson could not “quite understand why the Israeli Government should take such a totally different view from that of all my top advisers. Is Israel prepared to live with the likely result [of Soviet arms and Nasserite domination in Jordan]?”²⁵⁰ Johnson also stressed that “I personally have grave misgivings over the potentially disastrous effects on our relations with the Arab states.”²⁵¹ However, Johnson was not opposed to compensation or direct arms sales to Israel. If Israel's Prime Minister Levi Eshkol accepted Johnson's arguments, Komer was instructed to imply that the US would consider supplying the tanks that Germany had cancelled.²⁵² Johnson saw two possible solutions: “Our choice is either to sell arms to both Israel and Jordan or to sell arms to neither.”²⁵³

The mood of the meeting between the Israeli government and the US trio, namely Special Advisor Robert Komer, Ambassador to Israel Walworth Barbour, and Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs and experienced diplomatic heavyweight, Averell W. Harriman, was not as bad as Johnson had anticipated.²⁵⁴ Although the talks were largely surrounded by good manners from both sides, Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir and Prime Minister Eshkol time and again said that a public American statement announcing Johnson's willingness to consider direct arms sales to Israel would accelerate their acceptance of the Jordanian arms package. It was evident that Israel accepted the necessity and reasons for the Jordanian arms sale but that it sought compensation in the form of a direct US arms sale, or at

²⁴⁹ President Johnson to Harriman and Komer, February 21, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 157.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, February 25, 1965. *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 159; Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer?." 533–534.

least a public declaration of support. Komer tried to persuade the Israelis that this was not the time for such a discussion. Israel had to accept the subtle guarantee or leave.²⁵⁵

In an afternoon meeting between Komer and Eshkol on February 26, 1965, the negotiations took a turn for the worse. Eshkol demanded a formal American commitment to Israel's security and asked for an official statement of American willingness to consider direct arms sales to Israel. Eshkol even brought specific mention of American bombers. It was the first time Israel raised such a request, and Komer had no means to provide an answer. From the very onset of the negotiations, Israel had to give in to US demands, keep the agreement secret, and make sure that Israel's friends in America abstain from making a political mess of it. Additionally, there was hope that Israel would accept, as preconditions to any direct American arms sale, inspections of the Dimona reactor and agree to no preemptive strikes against the Arab states diversion work of the Jordan River. As of February 1965 the US was only willing to *consider* direct arms sales. Israel's two alternatives, in American policymakers' minds at least, were to accept the deal or see the Soviet Union overrun Jordan with arms. So when Eshkol requested specific hardware, it was out of touch with the agreement Johnson had in mind.²⁵⁶

To bring Israel closer to an agreement, American policymakers adopted a new approach. Harriman suggested giving specific references to tanks and even fighters: "[T]he more specific we can make this undertaking the more quickly [an] agreement can be reached, and the more leverage we have on [the] other points we want."²⁵⁷ The ambition was to reach a meeting of minds promptly. King Hussein was being stalled close to the breaking point. Rusk replied from Washington that the US was willing to furnish portions of Israel's defense needs, but that bombers were out of question at the moment.²⁵⁸ Even with the carefully worded statement that the US would sympathetically consider any Israeli defense needs, Eshkol could not agree and continued to defer the American demands of accepting the Arab diversion of the Jordan River and IAEA inspection.²⁵⁹ Harriman would return to Washington shortly but felt that his visit after all had been productive: "[I] [r]egret I haven't been able to bring home the bacon but feel that much has been accomplished in calming Israeli emotions on our providing

²⁵⁵ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, February 26, 1965. *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 161.

²⁵⁶ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, February 27, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 164.

²⁵⁷ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, February 28, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 165.

²⁵⁸ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, February 28, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 166.

²⁵⁹ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, February 28, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 167.

arms to Jordan and the ground has been prepared for reasonable future understandings on issues involved.”²⁶⁰

On March 1, Rusk stated that neither Johnson nor he could accept any further delays in the reply to King Hussein and that an agreement had to be found. To speed up the process, Rusk proposed that the US could compensate Israel’s loss of the German deal, but he also demanded that Israel should accept regular international inspections of the Dimona reactor before a sale could take place, and stated that the “the United States cannot support any Israeli flirtation with nuclear weapons.”²⁶¹

The Breaking Point

Komer was instructed to remain in Tel Aviv to assist Barbour in pressuring the Israeli government to concede to the American demands and consent to the Jordanian arms sale. On March 2, 1965 in his closing meeting with Eshkol and Meir, Harriman made some headway regarding an agreement.²⁶² And on March 3, after Harriman had left, Johnson authorized Komer to try another tactic:

The President has decided that in view of Israeli difficulties with the proposal carried by Harriman, as subsequently modified at Israeli insistence, we might now take another track. You should inform Eshkol that while we cannot wait longer to go forward with our agreement with Jordan, which as Israelis [is] aware we consider in mutual interest of Israel and [the United States Government], we recognize Israeli concerns. In view of Israeli hesitation in accepting proposal presented by Harriman with subsequent modifications we were able to make, we are now prepared to make following alternative offer.²⁶³

The alternative offer was that Washington could sell arms and equipment to Israel of the equivalent number and quality as was proposed to Jordan.²⁶⁴ Such a sale would, however, not signal a shift in the US arms policy, and Rusk emphasized that the sale would merely be a one-time exception from the current policy of abstinence from supplying arms to the region.²⁶⁵ The move presented a quick solution to Israel’s loss of the German tank deal, but if Israel accepted, Rusk would revoke sympathetic consideration of Israel’s defense needs that

²⁶⁰ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, February 28, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 167; Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, February 28, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 168.

²⁶¹ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, March 1, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 169.

²⁶² In this meeting Eshkol agreed that he would not authorize the development nuclear weapons, but due to domestic concerns he was unwilling to put it in writing, and Barbour recommended “that we not attempt to force Israelis beyond what Eshkol can do at this time.” Regarding the Arab states’ diversion of the Jordan River, Eshkol agreed to exhaust all peaceful means to insure Israel’s access to the river, but he reserved Israel’s right to act with force if such attempts proved unsuccessful. Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, March 2, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 173.

²⁶³ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, March 3, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 175.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

opted for larger sales of more advanced equipment in the future. In the end, Eshkol did not view a one-time deal as more attractive than an open-ended consideration, and the negotiations deadlocked once more.²⁶⁶

From the outset of the mission, Komer, Harriman and Barbour stressed to the Israeli government that the issue had to be solved quickly. If not, King Hussein would be forced to accept Soviet weapons, and both sides would lose. By March 6, 1965 nearly one month had passed since the need for urgency had first been called for, and in the meantime no deal had been concluded with Hussein. The American indecisiveness demonstrated that Israel could wait out for a better deal.²⁶⁷ Komer launched two alternatives: “either ... make [the] final offer good enough to sign up Israel; or ... soften up Israelis by showing them they don't have veto on Jordan arms.”²⁶⁸ Komer was authorized to pursue the first option. On March 8, 1965 Komer was instructed to seek out Eshkol. The new draft agreement he presented bore specific mention of nearly two hundred tanks and as many as twenty fighters of unspecified model directly supplied to Israel from the US at some undesignated time in the future.²⁶⁹

By March 11, 1965 Eshkol finally agreed and signed a memorandum of understanding in which Israel accepted the Jordanian arms sale, gave informal assurances that it would not acquire nuclear weapons, and gave yet another assurance that it would not attack the Arab states' Jordan River diversion scheme. The memorandum of understanding was not a legal document but rather an informal gentleman's agreement.²⁷⁰ The most contested item in the memorandum of understanding was periodic inspections of the Dimona reactor, but Johnson decided to leave the discussion of formalities for later, thus enabling Israel to continue to dispute the issue.²⁷¹

With the domestic flank cleared and the US-Israel relationship safeguarded, the negotiation of the ground force package to Jordan was finally completed. On March 12, 1965 King Hussein was informed of the agreement between Israel and the US, but his reaction was calm. He hoped the Jordanian arms sale would not result in American arms sales to Israel, but he

²⁶⁶ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, March 5, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 177.

²⁶⁷ Komer to Bundy, March 6, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 180.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, March 8, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 182.

²⁷⁰ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, March 11, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Document 184; Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, March 11, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Document 185; State Department to Embassy Amman, March 10, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 186.

²⁷¹ Ben-Zvi, "Influence and Arms." 49–51.

recognized that Israel could not be denied arms.²⁷² The US-Jordan arms deal was finally formalized on March 18, 1965. The aircraft would be European and the tanks and ground force equipment American. The Jordanian arms deal was sufficient in keeping Jordan in the Western camp, and although the month-long negotiations with Israel immediately led to negotiations of a direct arms sale to Israel, the US had averted a domestic and foreign crisis and maintained its carefully balanced image of impartiality.²⁷³

Fueling two opposing sides of a conflict contradicted the Johnson administration's ambition to preserve a stable *status quo*, but it was perceived to be the only way to ensure stability in Jordan, security for Israel and domestic support for other policies. By March 1965, the prospect of armed confrontation between Israel and Jordan was perceived to be so unlikely that the arms sales were believed to be one-time deviations from policy. As Komer told Johnson, "I think we finally came out all right—and without giving more than we'd have to give sooner or later anyway to our Israeli friends."²⁷⁴ In hindsight, the Johnson administration gambled that the UAC would fall apart and obviate the need for arms. The gamble failed. Arab nationalism was accelerating, and the tensions of the Arab-Israeli conflict rose to a level where the status quo eventually collapsed.

²⁷² Embassy Amman to State Department, March 12, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 188.

²⁷³ Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963–68." 536.

²⁷⁴ Komer to President Johnson, March 13, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 190.

Chapter 4: Reluctant Observer

The ambition to preserve the status quo in the Middle East initially seemed reasonably possible to achieve. The Jordanian arms sale had secured Jordan in the Western camp, and Israel had assured it would neither introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East nor would it attack the Arab states' work on diverting the Jordan River. Johnson had an opportunity to concentrate his foreign policy on the worsening situation in Vietnam, but as the number of soldiers killed continued to rise in Southeast Asia, Johnson came under increasing domestic criticism.²⁷⁵ Thus, Johnson was cautious not to stretch his domestic support too far. In the Middle East, however, Johnson used the relatively good relationship between Israel and Jordan to demonstrate the fairness of US Middle East policy to other Arab states on which strategic interests depended. Nonetheless, Johnson's image of impartiality faced a serious challenge when the relationship between Israel and Jordan collapsed in 1966.

For some time, Johnson successfully balanced on the thin edge with commitment to Israel's security on the one hand and support for Jordan's stability on the other. The administration took great interest in preserving the *de facto* peace between Israel and Jordan. It served as the basis for Johnson's attempt to forward the image of impartiality in the Arab-Israeli dispute. However, shortly after the conclusion of the Jordan arms sale and while the negotiations of an arms sale to Israel were underway, tensions rapidly escalated in the Middle East. Arab nationalism was on a high tide and showed no signs of subsiding. In an effort to deter acts of aggression, Israel, slowly at first but soon resolutely and determined, adopted a retaliatory policy in response to Palestinian infiltrations. Palestinian infiltrations and Israeli reprisals became a cycle of increasing violence that eventually culminated with the Israeli attack on the West Bank village of Samu in November 1966. By then it was Israel, Johnson's most trusted partner in the Middle East, that "deliberately destroyed" his attempt to preserve the *status quo*.²⁷⁶

How did Johnson's administration deal with the souring relationship between Jordan and Israel? Why did the administration fail to preserve the troubled, but stable *status quo*, and how did that contribute to the first steps toward war between Israel and Jordan?

²⁷⁵ Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 391–394.

²⁷⁶ Lazarowitz, "Different Approaches to a Regional Search for Balance." 49.

Retaliation and Escalation

The trouble on the border between Jordan and Israel was rapidly accelerated when Palestinian guerillas started targeting Israeli work sites for diverting the Jordan River. Fatah emerged by 1966 as the most coordinated, daring, and active Palestinian organization that took upon itself to establish a Palestinian state by military means.²⁷⁷ To achieve its objective, Fatah launched guerilla raids into Israel and aimed to provoke border clashes that would drag the Arab states into another war with Israel.²⁷⁸ Contrary to earlier infiltrations, these were well organized and clearly politically motivated raids. Israel believed the infiltrators were sponsored by the Arab states in an undeclared war against its existence. Israel's security doctrine had for long been rooted in the belief in deterrent capacity, and infiltrations only accelerated such beliefs. Moreover, Israel began provoking incidents in the border areas to produce excuses to attack and forestall the Arab states' attempt to divert the Jordan River.²⁷⁹ Israel claimed the Palestinian sabotage raids, and Fatah's in particular, were a preamble to a coming declaration of war by the Arab states, and Israel used the infiltrations as a pretext to demonstrate its military superiority. Since Jordan had a large Palestinian population and the longest border with Israel, many Fatah infiltrations were launched from Jordan, and consequently several Israeli reprisals were aimed at Fatah's bases in Jordan.²⁸⁰

In spite of the assurances it had conceded to in the March 1965 memorandum of understanding, Israel launched several retaliatory raids against the Arab states' work sites to divert the Jordan River. Israel believed that if it did nothing to prevent the Arab states' diversion scheme it would lose its allotted share of the waters. The US on the other hand perceived Israel's unilateralism as destabilizing and tried to dissuade Israel from answering private Palestinian infiltrations with attacks on state-sponsored Arab work sites. In America's eyes retaliations only provoked further infiltrations which in turn only lead to further reprisals. Israel's Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, although he emphasized that he was not preparing for war to protect the Israeli diversion scheme, still maintained that retaliations were effective in coping with infiltrations.²⁸¹ The State Department declared that the US could not condone any shooting related to the Jordan River projects and stressed that if Israel had

²⁷⁷ Waage, *Konflikt Og Stormaktspolitikk I Midtøsten*. 226.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. 266, 336–337.

²⁷⁹ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 232.

²⁸⁰ Waage, *Konflikt Og Stormaktspolitikk I Midtøsten*. 226; Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 230–232.

²⁸¹ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, April 23, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 210.

any expectations of American support in the water dispute, it would have to follow US advice.²⁸²

In an effort to find out if there was any basis of truth in Eshkol's fears regarding the Jordan River, US Ambassador to Jordan, Robert G. Barnes, asked King Hussein in early May 1965 if there was an Arab plan for the destruction of Israel or a plan to prevent Israel from utilizing the Jordan River. The king answered that the Arab armies' modernization program was designed to protect the Arab diversion scheme. The king said there was no plan to prevent Israel from acquiring its allotted share of the Jordan River, and no plans were laid in preparation for a war against Israel. To Hussein at least, the motivation behind modernization of the army was sparked by a desire to enable Jordan to protect itself from Israeli retaliations, and the king had a sincere desire to keep infiltrations to an absolute minimum. His silent support from Israel depended on his ability and commitment in keeping the infiltrators at bay.²⁸³

In Israel, military reprisals were widely accepted as the best means available in deterring infiltrators and the government was hardly impressed with King Hussein's statement. On May 19, 1965 Israel opened fire on bulldozers working on the Syrian side of diversion project, and ordered air strikes and used artillery against the Syrian bulldozers. The US expressed sincere misgivings about Israel's extensive use of force and urged caution.²⁸⁴ In a meeting with American Ambassador to Israel, Walworth Barbour, Eshkol claimed that the incident with the Syrian bulldozers had sent unmistakable signals that the Arab armies had no chance to force an end to Israel's interests in the Jordan River.²⁸⁵ Under the pretext that Israel would be in a worse position to ensure its share of water once the Arab states completed their installations, Eshkol maintained that force might still become necessary.²⁸⁶ Barbour reported a grim prediction of Eshkol's preemptive mentality: "[H]e still holds to his thinking tenaciously and will be dissuaded if at all only with difficulty."²⁸⁷

The US did not share Israel's assessment of being under threat, but warnings against continued reliance on military action fell on deaf ears. Eshkol's mindset was set on retaliation and the Johnson administration found no obvious way to alleviate the pressure that Israel

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Embassy Amman to State Department, May 8, 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 213.

²⁸⁴ Memorandum for Record, May 20, 1956, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 216.

²⁸⁵ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, May 25, 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 219.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

believed itself to be under. The disregard for American advice was highlighted when Israel attacked three villages on the West Bank on May 27–28, 1965. It signaled that Israel was willing to ignore US cautions. Moreover, Israeli reprisals had usually been pinpoint attacks, but the raid on May 27–28 marked a change in Israel’s methods. Secretary of State Dean Rusk criticized Israel’s use of force and claimed that sustained artillery fire was not in line with a pinpoint assault.²⁸⁸ Israel countered by asserting that the raid had been aimed at Fatah infiltrators operating from Jordan, and asked the US to pressure King Hussein to crack down on the bases.²⁸⁹

As infiltrations and raids continued to take place on the Jordan-Israel border during June 1965, Rusk warned that Israel’s retaliations signaled an aggressive posture rather than a peaceful one:

We would have expected ... that [Israel’s] actions would be characterized more consistently by calm, confidence and restraint expected of [a] nation whose security is essentially, if not absolutely, assured. However we have noted [that Israel] on several occasions [during the] past six weeks has acted as if its existence was in immediate jeopardy. [Israel’s] reaction late May to alleged Fatah raids was out of proportion to damage [from] those raids and appears to us ill-advised in that [the] target nation was one that seemed to be working [to] curb terrorist activities.²⁹⁰

Israel was non-responsive to Rusk’s caution and continued to blame Jordan for not cracking down on insurgents in Jordanian territory. It denied evidence to the contrary as forged or insufficient. The US had pressured King Hussein to do his part in preventing infiltrations and saw no reason to doubt his effort. Moreover, the US understood King’s painful dilemma. Cracking down on his own citizens threatened the popularity he enjoyed among the West Bank Palestinians, but failing to protect them from Israel’s retaliations had the same consequence. Not answering Israel’s raids on May 27 was as far the king could go, and the US realized that in the future Hussein would be hard pressed to order his army into action, if the reprisals did not stop.²⁹¹

Limiting Israel’s Preemptive Mentality

The State Department, the safeguard of strategic interests in the Arab world, saw Israel’s unilateralism as a challenge to the fragile *status quo*, and suggested using arms sales to dissuade Israel from retaliation and to regain influence in Israel. By using arms sales as a

²⁸⁸ State Department to Certain Posts, May 28, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 220.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, July 19, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 227.

²⁹¹ Airgram A-69 from Amman to State Department, August 5, 1965, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2388, Folder POL 15-1 JORDAN.

carrot, it was hoped that Israel would be willing to listen to American advice. American-Israeli arms sales negotiations were well under way by spring 1965. The original March deal was for a direct sale of 210 tanks, upgrading kits to install larger cannons on several more tanks and artillery cannons. However, Israel continued to pressure for more. Israel's interest in fighter aircraft had been deferred to European suppliers, but Israel kept overestimating the Arab aerial combat strength and avoided the European market only to procure American aircraft.²⁹² President Johnson's Special Advisor, Robert W. Komer informed Johnson of the hardening Israeli position:

When I was out there [in February/March 1965], they talked about an old light bomber like the B-66, which they thought they could buy for peanuts. We agreed to help them get up to 24 "combat" planes (not necessarily bombers) either in Europe or here. Since then we've convinced them that the B-66 is not available as surplus so now they're asking for the F-4, our fanciest current operational model.²⁹³

Israel had made specific reference to the B-66 bomber, an aircraft that, with some modifications, could be enabled to carry nuclear bombs, but nonetheless termed as a defensive weapon. By June, Israel requested the brand new F-4 Phantom interceptor fighter, a far more advanced and undoubtedly offensive weapon that by default was capable of carrying nuclear payloads.²⁹⁴ Komer did not believe the Phantom was what had been laid out during the month-long negotiations in February and March 1965, and told Johnson that the "F-4 is ... simply outside the spirit of our understanding ... would cost them a mint ... and ... raise hob with the Arabs."²⁹⁵

Komer was a prime pragmatist, and he was not afraid to replace the carrot with a stick to bring Israel around. Although he accepted Israel's need for modern fighters, Komer believed that "it is far wiser for us to soften them up on certain conditions ... than to give way piecemeal and end up getting less than otherwise."²⁹⁶ Komer wanted Israel to officially forswear nuclear weapons, sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and give a firm guarantee that it would not attack Arab work sites for diverting the Jordan River. Komer did not oppose a direct sale of aircraft, but he believed that by stalling the US could force through a change in Israel's handling of infiltrations and hopefully acquire Israeli acceptance of IAEA inspections of the nuclear reactor in Dimona.²⁹⁷ By the end of July 1965, Komer informed

²⁹² State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, June 5, 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 222.

²⁹³ Memorandum from Komer to Johnson, June 16, 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 224.

²⁹⁴ Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 576.

²⁹⁵ Memorandum from Komer to Johnson, June 16, 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 224.

²⁹⁶ Komer to Bundy, January 21, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 263.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Johnson that the tank deal had been concluded on the original basis. He had successfully fended off Israeli attempts to sweeten the deal and deferred the sale of fighters to future negotiations.²⁹⁸

There was no mention of Israel's use of reprisals or IAEA inspection in the tank deal. Komer realized that the tank deal aimed to score Israeli acceptance of the Jordanian arms package and left the issues to future discussions, but Komer believed a sale of fighter aircraft could make Israel accept the American demands of regular inspections of the Dimona reactor later.²⁹⁹ The key prize Komer wanted to extract from Israel was compliance with IAEA inspection, but he also stated that "it's good to have leverage on the Israelis because we don't like their threats to attack the Arab water diversion works."³⁰⁰

Komer's pragmatic influence on policymaking encompassed several aspects of policy. Foreign policy, the Cold War and electoral considerations played into the formulations of Komer's recommendations. The domestic considerations led Komer to view the US-Israel relationship as one among a decreasing number of platforms on which Johnson's domestic support rested, but one that could be strengthened. Vietnam was taking its toll on Johnson's popularity in America, and Komer was therefore inclined to side with Israel's arms requests because they could boost the President's popularity. On the other side of the spectrum was the State Department which had never been too supportive of the Israel pillar of American Middle East policy and believed it compromised strategic interests in the Arab world.³⁰¹ In this instance, Komer approved Secretary of State Dean Rusk's recommendation that the US should threaten Israel with making "continued [arms] deliveries contingent on no preemptive strikes."³⁰²

Trouble on the Jordan-Israel Border

Israel's perception of the security situation differed so much from the American assessment that even threats to withhold arms deliveries proved ineffective in keeping Israel in line. The number of infiltrations and retaliations rose steadily throughout the summer of 1965. It forced the US to accept being a mere messenger between Israel and Jordan. Israeli Foreign Minister

²⁹⁸ Komer to President Johnson, July 29, 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 230.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ Ben-Zvi, "Influence and Arms." 34-35; Abraham Ben-Zvi, *Lyndon B. Johnson and the Politics of Arms Sales to Israel: In the Shadow of the Hawk* (London: Frank Cass, 2004). 5; Abraham Ben-Zvi, "Stumbling into an Alliance: John F. Kennedy and Israel," *Israel Affairs* 15, no. 3 (2009). 228.

³⁰² State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, July 30, 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 231. See footnote 1.

Golda Meir asserted Israel's efforts to keep the border calm, but she argued that it could not stand idly by as Fatah infiltrators staged sabotage missions from inside Jordan.³⁰³ Meir asked the US to pressure King Hussein to do more, but Meir was unwilling to acknowledge that Israel had a potential to relax the tensions by scaling down the retaliations.³⁰⁴ As tensions between Israel and Jordan mounted, the US lost much of its leverage on both sides. Israel claimed to have followed US guidelines but that it could not do so forever: Jordan had to do more.³⁰⁵ However, the US Embassy in Amman reported that there was little else for Jordan to do without ruining the king's domestic standing, Jordan's position in the Arab world, and that King Hussein was going along with Nasser and the UAC "because he fears the adverse consequences to his own position if he does not."³⁰⁶

The US realized that Israel's reprisals only escalated the tensions and forged the Arab ranks, but it had not yet found any desirable means for bringing Israel to change its policy. Another arms sale could potentially bring about a change, but without an official Israeli declaration of the peaceful nature of the Dimona reactor, the US found this option undesirable.³⁰⁷ Therefore, when Israel presented concrete suggestions for what Jordan could do, the US believed it to have as good a chance for success as any. Ambassador Barnes relayed Israel's suggestions to the Jordanian Prime Minister, Wasfi al-Tall, and emphasized that the suggestions were not endorsed by the US government. Prime Minister Tall was irritated that Israel seemingly gave orders on what to do. Jordan was doing its part, Tall argued, and King Hussein had authorized extensive measures to prevent infiltrations from Jordanian territory.³⁰⁸ Tall asked Barnes to inform Israel that Jordan would not sit out another raid and cautioned that if Israel raided again, Jordan would retaliate. Barnes reported there was no reason continuing to doubt Jordan's effort, and that being asked to relay Israeli suggestions to Jordan in such a manner had been "embarrassing".³⁰⁹

There was evidently little doubt about Jordan's desire to maintain a stable border, but when Ambassador Barbour relayed Tall's comments on the Jordanian measures to the Israeli government, Foreign Minister Meir bluntly asserted that Fatah infiltrations happened in spite

³⁰³ Rusk to State Department, September 30, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 238.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ State Department to Embassy Amman, October 8, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 241.

³⁰⁶ Airgram A-69 from Embassy Amman to State Department, August 5, 1965, NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2388, Folder POL 15-1 JORDAN.

³⁰⁷ Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 576.

³⁰⁸ Moshe Shemesh and Moshe Tlamim, "The Idf Raid on Samu': The Turning-Point in Jordan's Relations with Israel and the West Bank Palestinians," *Israel Studies* 7, no. 1 (2002). 150–151.

³⁰⁹ Embassy Amman to State Department, October 20, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 245.

of Jordan's countermeasures.³¹⁰ Therefore, Israel could not be expected to abandon the policy of retaliation, Meir argued. Barbour disagreed and stressed that reprisals served no purpose other than provoking further infiltrations and running the risk of forcing King Hussein to retaliate.³¹¹ He made no headway. Israel steadfastly held to its firm belief that reprisals were the best available option and did not cooperate.³¹² King Hussein was willing to do his part, and the US was impressed with the lengths to which Hussein was willing to go, and realized that in the face of Israeli intransigence, "our relations with King Hussein and his Government take on ever increasing importance" in order to ensure the *status quo*.³¹³

Nonetheless, Israel kept pressing Jordan ever harder, and it did not realize the degree of domestic pressure its raids caused in Jordan. This gradually led King Hussein to believe that Israel was not honest in their secret assurances that a stable Jordan was in Israel's interest. The meeting of minds between Israel and Jordan was breaking apart. Hussein privately suspected that Israel was seeking to capture the West Bank if it only got the pretext it needed.³¹⁴ As a result of Israel's retaliations, increasing discontent was spreading throughout Jordan. In early December 1965 the CIA brought King Hussein's deteriorating domestic position to the attention of US policymakers. In a grim forecast, intelligence officers predicted that even though Hussein tried to the best of his ability to curb infiltrations, retaliatory raids by Israel and continued infiltrations from the Arab states could lead to the most serious Arab-Israeli clash since Suez.³¹⁵

The report did not yet result in any evident attempt to strengthen King Hussein, and the US was still unwilling to risk its relations with Israel in order to bring an end to Israel's use of force. However, when King Hussein in late December 1965 said Jordan was unable to procure European aircraft on reasonable terms, he forced the US to reassess how much influence domestic considerations should have on foreign policy.³¹⁶ Realizing that Hussein could not withstand the popular Arab pressure to accept Soviet aircraft at spot price, Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara recommended that Jordan should be allowed to purchase thirty-six F-104 Starfighters. The Starfighter was a fighter-bomber which could operate in a grey

³¹⁰ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, November 10, 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 251.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² Lazarowitz, "Different Approaches to a Regional Search for Balance." 48.

³¹³ Read to Bundy, November 5, 1965, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964-1966: PD, Box 2388, Folder POL 15-1 JORDAN.

³¹⁴ Shemesh and Tlamim, "The Idf Raid on Samu'." 145; Clea Lutz Bunch, "Strike at Samu: Jordan, Israel, the United States, and the Origins of the Six-Day War," *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 1 (2008). 56.

³¹⁵ Special Report by the CIA, December 3, 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 255.

³¹⁶ Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963-68." 537.

area as both an offensive and a defensive weapon, but the secretaries advised Johnson to only approve the sale of a version of the Starfighter with defensive capabilities.³¹⁷

The secretaries also realized that such a sale would ignite Israeli criticism. To anticipate that criticism and to speed up the sale to Jordan, the secretaries recommended Johnson to also approve the sale of twenty-four A-4 Skyhawk attack-bombers to Israel.³¹⁸ The Skyhawk was less advanced and less obviously offensive than the Phantom which Israel had requested, but it was considerably more advanced than the Starfighter the secretaries recommended for Jordan. Along with the first twenty-four aircraft, Israel would also have an option to purchase another twenty-four of the same aircraft, either all at once or the last twenty-four later. Komer's earlier suggestion that a sale of fighter aircraft to Israel should be coupled with Israeli compliance with IAEA inspection was not mentioned by the secretaries.³¹⁹ Rusk and his State Department had gradually started accepting that in the absence of conventional arms, "those in Israel who advocate acquisition of nuclear weapons will find a much more fertile environment for their views".³²⁰

Reclaiming Leverage

The Unified Arab Command (UAC) had learned of Jordan's inability to purchase Western fighters and reintroduced the Soviet option. The secretaries believed the administration could repeat the same procedure as in the tank deals. Selling arms to both sides would prevent the Soviet Union from entering Jordan without damaging Johnson's image of impartiality.³²¹ On February 8, 1966 Komer sent Johnson an extensive memorandum discussing the best course of action. Komer's reason for selling aircraft to Jordan was that if the Soviet Union supplied Jordan militarily, it could mean the subversion of Hussein's moderate regime. He also realized that the US would be forced to adopt a more pro-Israel policy in such a scenario, and he underscored that Israel "recognize that our subsidizing King Hussein is worth its weight in gold to them."³²² The necessity of preserving good relations with Jordan was for Komer "to prevent the closing of a hostile Arab ring around Israel."³²³ Komer believed that

Hussein's ability to stay on his uneasy throne depends critically on his not appearing to be a US or Israeli stooge (his grandfather was assassinated for this reason). We've already stalled

³¹⁷ Ibid. 538.

³¹⁸ Rusk and McNamara to President Johnson, undated, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 262.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 576.

³²¹ Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963-68." 538.

³²² Komer to President Johnson, February 8, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 267.

³²³ Ibid.

Hussein to the point of no return—in his judgment and that of our Ambassador. Jordan's independence is important enough to us, and to Israel, that we should not risk jeopardizing it short of over-riding reasons.³²⁴

President Johnson approved, and King Hussein entered negotiations with US representatives shortly after. Komer then suggested using the advanced fighters to force Israel to listen more sincerely to the US. An arms sale to Israel would increase its deterrent capabilities and obviate the need for an American security guarantee, and the need to strike preemptively against any perceived threats.³²⁵ Komer also highlighted the aircraft sale's potential in obviating Israel's interest in a nuclear option: "Desperation is what would most likely drive Israel to this choice, should it come to feel that the conventional balance was turning against it. So ... US arms supply, aimed at maintaining a deterrent balance, is as good an inhibitor as we've got."³²⁶ Komer informed Johnson of the other benefit of an arms balance in Israel's favor:

Since our own deep commitment to Israel's security would almost force us to intervene if there were another major Arab-Israeli flareup, it is in our interest to help Israel maintain a sufficient deterrent edge to warn off Nasser and other eager beavers. And the more secure Israel feels, the less likely it is to strike first, as at Suez.³²⁷

In agreement with Komer Johnson saw little interest in Jordan except that a stable Jordan was in Israel's interest.³²⁸ President Johnson took great interest in preserving strategic interests in the Arab world, but he viewed Israel with even more interest and agreed with Komer's recommendation that the US should sell aircraft to both Jordan and Israel.³²⁹ Johnson was inclined to sell fighters sooner rather than later, but Rusk and the NEA cautioned that it would serve US interests better if Israel foreswore nuclear intentions and vowed not to act preemptively against the Arab states as preconditions to a sale. The Department of Defense and McNamara agreed, and the secretary of defense asserted that the Phantom fighter was out of the question. On February 12, 1966 McNamara presented a specific aircraft package consisting of forty-eight Skyhawks to the newly appointed Foreign Minister of Israel, Abba Eban, and asked for a prompt answer. To avoid domestic opposition, McNamara bluntly said that "in the absence of Israeli concurrence and support, the US would not sell aircraft to Jordan."³³⁰ Israel was naturally interested in advanced weaponry, and when a moderate Jordan

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 576.

³²⁶ Komer to President Johnson, February 8, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 267.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Memorandum for the Record, February 9, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 268.

³²⁹ Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 577.

³³⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, February 12, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 271.

could emerge from it, there was little reason not to accept the deal: On February 22, 1966 Komer informed Johnson of Israel's acceptance of the Skyhawk package.³³¹

There was no formal agreement regarding Israel's use of retaliation or of IAEA inspection between Israel and the US. President Johnson was distressed by the potentiality of an Israeli nuclear weapons production, but he too realized that a strengthened conventional Israeli arsenal possibly could postpone such Israeli plans, and he therefore once again left these issues issue to future discussions.³³² On February 25, 1966 Johnson approved the aircraft sales to Jordan and Israel.³³³ About one month later, Johnson's administration formally closed the deals with Israel and Jordan. Israel was to receive all forty-eight Skyhawks at once while Jordan had signed a deal for thirty-six secondhand Starfighters.³³⁴ In addition to the greater quantity and advanced state of Israel's purchased fighters, their delivery was agreed to take place faster than the delivery to Jordan.³³⁵ Moreover, the US had once again settled with only vague concessions that Israel would not introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East, would not oppose the Jordanian aircraft sale, and "from time to time" would open the Dimona reactor to American, but not to international inspection.³³⁶

The Johnson administration had hoped the aircraft sale would make Israel listen to US advice, but Fatah infiltrations from Jordan continued along with ever larger Israeli reprisals. Even with renewed means to influence policy in Israel, the US only observed the deteriorating situation throughout the summer of 1966. Already on May 2, 1966 the US Embassy asked King Hussein to refrain from retaliation after an Israeli raid against Fatah bases on the West Bank. Hussein replied that he was doing everything he possibly could to prevent infiltrations into Israel, even though he was under heavy domestic pressure to retaliate.³³⁷ The US was well aware of Jordan's effort to curb the infiltrators and saw no reason to doubt the king's interest in doing so, and it took no interest in Israel's attempt to discredit the Jordanian effort.³³⁸ Hussein was weary of the US constantly urging restraint on Jordan rather than pressuring Israel to lessen its aggression. King Hussein was not only under pressure from his

³³¹ Komer to President Johnson, February 22, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 273.

³³² Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 576-577.

³³³ Komer to President Johnson, February 22, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 273. See footnote 4.

³³⁴ McNaughton to McNamara, March 31, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 283.

³³⁵ Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963-68." 539.

³³⁶ McNaughton to McNamara, March 31, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 283. See footnote 5; Ben-Zvi, "Influence and Arms." 53-55.

³³⁷ Embassy Amman to State Department, May 2, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 287.

³³⁸ Embassy Amman to the Director of NEA, March 14, 1966. NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964-1966: PD, Box 2390, Folder POL JORDAN-US.

population and fellow Arab statesmen to retaliate, but his patience with Israel was running low: ““Do not come to me on next occasion asking that I restrain [my] army. We cannot continue [to] take attacks [of] this sort and retaliation [is] apparently [the] only language Israelis understand.””³³⁹

King Hussein could not understand why Israel continued the retaliations, and he was irritated of its failure to understand that the raids jeopardized Jordan’s moderate policy.³⁴⁰ Through secret channels and through the US Embassy, Hussein had described the disruptive effects the raids had on his moderate policy, but presented with the Israeli failure to heed his warnings he speculated that Israel sought to provoke Jordan as a way to create a pretext for a full-scale attack.³⁴¹ The only reason King Hussein could find for Israel’s continuation of attacks on Jordan was that Israel secretly wanted to seize the West Bank, and he had nursed that thought privately for some time. The embassy reported that although the king was calm, he had seemed deeply troubled by the domestic opposition against him as he once more ordered his army to stay at base.³⁴²

To US observers King Hussein seemed able to cope with the domestic situation, but his reluctance to answer Israeli retaliations accelerated the Arab rivalry. Hussein was attacked by Nasser with ferocious propaganda. Nasser accused the king of departing from the Cairo Summit declarations and for being permissive toward Israel.³⁴³ To boost Hussein’s confidence, and to reward his brave stance against the calls for answering Israeli raids and accepting Soviet arms, Walt Rostow, Komer’s successor as special assistant to the president for national security affairs after March 1966, recommended Johnson to approve a twenty million dollar budget support to Jordan.³⁴⁴ Rostow saw a “clear political case for keeping Israel’s longest and most vulnerable flank out of Nasser’s hands”:³⁴⁵

Hussein [has] resisted heavy Arab pressure to take MIGs. He has privately agreed to keep his armor off the west bank of the Jordan where Israel would be hard-pressed to defend. He has squelched fanatical Arabs raiding across Israel’s borders. He has resisted heavy pressure from his military—whose support keeps him in power—to retaliate when Israel has attacked Jordanian villages harboring those raiders.³⁴⁶

³³⁹ Embassy Amman to State Department, May 2, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 287.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Airgram A-1085 from Embassy Cairo to Department of State, June 21, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL JORDAN-UAR.

³⁴⁴ Rostow to President Johnson, June 16, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 300.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Still, there was no evidence that Jordan itself served the US any other purpose than keeping Israel's eastern flank moderate. Rostow, much like Komer, believed the alternative to King Hussein would be a radicalized Jordan flooded with Soviet arms and influence. The Soviet influence would lead to a far worse and more volatile border. More so than Komer, Rostow did not see Soviet influence in its own right as the worst evil, it was its consequences for Israel that should be feared: "[W]e would rather not subsidize Jordan, nor sell tanks and jets to Arabs. But after painful consideration, we see no other way to keep Soviet-backed radical Arabs off Israel's softest flank."³⁴⁷ American policy toward Jordan had gradually begun to shift from aiming to contain Soviet influence, to aiming to ensure Israel's security.

Nevertheless, neither aircraft nor funds enabled Jordan to prevent Fatah infiltrators from launching sabotage missions from Jordan into Israel throughout the summer and fall of 1966. And aircraft proved ineffective in sobering Israel's reaction to the infiltrations. Gradually, Jordan's permissiveness assumed precedence over Israel's retaliations in the Arab rivalry's propaganda battle. In October 1966 Israel informed the US that the most recent infiltrations were carried out by Syrians, and that the aggressive Syrian government was deliberately trying to humiliate Jordan by sending Syrian-sponsored Fatah infiltrators via Jordan into Israel. By putting Jordan at the receiving end of Israeli retaliations, Syria could attack King Hussein's permissive moderation toward Israel. Upon learning of Syria's tactic, the State Department questioned Israel's conduct of knowingly attacking a third party which did its best to prevent the use of its territory for infiltrations. Israel appreciated Hussein's effort to limit the incursions, but firmly asserted that it had to retaliate to demonstrate decisiveness.³⁴⁸ Rusk could only observe that the US could do nothing to prevent further deterioration:

Failure [of] all Arab governments to curb Fatah operations will, in our considered opinion, almost certainly lead to major Israeli retaliation that could embroil [the] area as [a] whole militarily. We are urging Israelis avoid retaliation and avail [them]selves of UN machinery, but there is limit to our influence in this regard if Fatah incidents continue. We recognize [that Jordan] has been making serious effort [to] control Fatah. Nevertheless, several recent incidents appear to have been launched from Jordanian territory. In discussing with us [Israel] has taken line [that Syria is] deliberately seeking [to] involve [Jordan] by staging Fatah incidents from Jordanian territory and that, although [Israel] believes [Jordan is] sincerely attempting [to] prevent such use [of] its territory, it is under growing domestic pressure to take action. We therefore urge [Jordan] [to] redouble efforts [to] prevent further Fatah operations from or through Jordan.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ State Department to Certain Posts, October 11, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 327.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

While Jordan was urged to do ever more, the State Department asked Israel to trust the UN apparatus.³⁵⁰ While the UN Security Council was working on a resolution condemning the recent attacks, nine more incidents took place, five of which were from Jordan.³⁵¹ Israeli officials in Washington expressed misgivings that while the UN failed to deter Fatah, the infiltrators went unpunished. In Israel's view, both the UN and Jordan were unable to prevent infiltrations. According to Israeli officials, only Israel could guarantee its own borders. The US accepted that the raids took place under the nose of the UN and Jordan but even when Israel's patience was running out the State Department could only plead with Israel to refrain from retaliation and ask that Israel trust in Jordan's ability to keep tensions low.³⁵²

Ignored Influence

The repeated US warnings and the substantial evidence of Jordan's efforts to halt infiltrations made no headway in making Israel reconsider the wisdom of the reprisals. When Palestinian infiltrators planted a landmine in Israel that resulted in three fatalities, the Israeli government deemed the time to be ripe for an assertive show of force against the infiltrators. On November 13, 1966 the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) stated an example of its determination and launched a large raid against Samu, a village of some twelve kilometers south- southwest of Hebron on the West Bank. In contrast to earlier reprisals where the goal had been to apprehend the infiltrators and destroy their bases, the raid on Samu was conducted in broad daylight by some four hundred soldiers, armed vehicles, tanks, artillery and air force. The targeted town of Samu had questionable value for Fatah and thereby also for the IDF. Moreover, Israel had only weeks earlier expressed understanding for the fact that Syria was trying to provoke exactly such an attack against Jordan. The IDF laid Samu in ruins, blew up nearly all the houses and a medical clinic. The Jordanian battalion sent to drive the IDF out came under fire, killing several Jordanian soldiers. Along with a large number of destroyed vehicles, Jordan lost a British-made fighter and its pilot in a short air battle against Israel's air force.³⁵³

Rusk realized that the US warnings against Israel's reliance on reprisals had limited effect at best, and he was deeply surprised by the violence inflicted by the raid. He took a hard line on Israel and expressed deep misgivings that King Hussein had been the victim of something the Israelis just days earlier had blamed Syria for. Rusk knew all too well that Israel was

³⁵⁰ State Department to Certain Posts, October 17, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 329.

³⁵¹ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, October 31, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 330.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ Bunch, "Strike at Samu." 55; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 223.

thoroughly informed of Hussein's efforts to prevent Fatah from using Jordanian territory for attacks on Israel.³⁵⁴ In Rusk's view the American ineffectiveness to present Israel with alternative reactions to infiltrations did not legitimate such a drastic escalation of violence on Israel's part and he felt betrayed: "We have served as intermediary between Israel and Jordan in the interests of peace—not in the interests of facilitating or explaining Israel's policy of retaliation."³⁵⁵ In Amman, Ambassador Barnes pleaded with Hussein to withstand the momentous pressure to retaliate.³⁵⁶

If Johnson's administration ever seriously considered ignoring Israel's advice on the Middle East policy, it was in the brief moments after the raid on Samu. Rostow was shocked: "This 300-man raid with tanks and planes was out of all proportion to the provocation and was aimed at the wrong target."³⁵⁷ Israel's explanations fell on deaf ears, and the top priority for Johnson's administration was how to shore up King Hussein. Strategic concerns were once more the primary American interest in Jordan but not primarily for the sake of preventing Soviet influence. Whereas before Samu, the US had looked reluctantly toward the king's need for support, it suddenly realized Israel had made Jordan ripe for a takeover by radical Arab nationalists, and such a development would threaten Israel's security.³⁵⁸

However, the US did not draw the same conclusion that King Hussein immediately reached. In the king's assessment Israel had sought to provoke a pretext to capture the entire West Bank.³⁵⁹ Moreover, the raid had revealed the inadequate training, organization and equipment of the Jordanian army. The popularity King Hussein had enjoyed at home was shattered, but the attack on Samu also inflamed the Arab rivalry that had been largely set aside since the Cairo Summit. The king came under an intense propaganda offensive from Syria and Egypt, which discredited the king's permissiveness and his failure to protect his own citizens. Hussein was personally blamed failing to protect Samu and for the loss of life. The Palestinians questioned their faith in the king and flocked to support the radicalism expressed by Egypt and Syria.³⁶⁰ It ignited riots and demonstrations that forced Hussein to dispatch the army against the demonstrators. Several civilians were killed, which only accelerated the

³⁵⁴ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, November 13, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18 Document 332.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ Rostow to President Johnson, November 15, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18 Document 333.

³⁵⁸ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, November 15, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 335.

³⁵⁹ Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963–68." 539; Bunch, "Strike at Samu." 61.

³⁶⁰ Telegram 1153 from Embassy Amman to State Department, November 17, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 23 JORDAN.

criticism against the king.³⁶¹ As so many times before, Hussein's delicate power base was disrupted by public discontent and foreign pressure. Fuelled by Syrian and Egyptian propaganda, the rioters called for the king's abdication.³⁶²

Cut the Cord?

For nearly a year the US had warned Israel of the destructive effects of their retaliations. Nonetheless, the Johnson administration had not been willing to risk its relations with Israel to ensure a peaceful *status quo*. Israel proved too valuable a source for domestic support, which Johnson desperately needed for his other policies, and in particular the American campaign in Vietnam.³⁶³ Therefore, Johnson in 1965 had decided against Rusk and Komer when they recommended "threatening to make continued [arms] deliveries [to Israel] contingent on no preemptive strikes."³⁶⁴ The US had not once issued warnings that continued reliance on retaliations would have consequences for the US-Israel relations. After Samu, the administration reassessed the wisdom of this policy. Johnson's administration for the first time seriously considered making good on its threat. Even Robert Komer, the stern believer in the balancing act, although reassigned in March 1966 to deal with Vietnam, privately informed an Israeli official that continued use of retaliations could force the US to reconsider all arms sales to Israel, "regardless of whether contracts had been signed or not."³⁶⁵

In Komer's view the raid "undermined the whole American effort to maintain Jordanian stability, which was so much in Israel's own interest that Israel's action was almost incomprehensible."³⁶⁶ The US Embassy in Amman reported that the raid not only had embarrassed King Hussein, it had also fueled the tense polarization between the radical and the moderate states of the Arab rivalry and a point was rapidly approaching where Hussein's regime could be in immediate jeopardy.³⁶⁷ The riots were still roaring, and on the West Bank, tanks had been ordered to disperse the crowds, which were declaring their support to Nasser.³⁶⁸ The US Embassy in Amman reported that "the outlook for easing ... tensions ...

³⁶¹ Telegram 1366 from Embassy Amman to State Department, December 2, 1966. NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 23 JORDAN.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ By late 1966, the North Vietnamese were conducting a tiring guerilla campaign that drained Johnson's domestic popularity. Rusk, *As I Saw It*. 394–396.

³⁶⁴ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, July 30, 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 231.

³⁶⁵ Komer to President Johnson, November 16, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 336.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ Telegram 477 from Consulate Jerusalem to State Department, December 12, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 23 JORDAN; Shemesh and Tlamim, "The Idf Raid on Samu." 153.

³⁶⁸ Telegram 1227 from Embassy Amman to State Department, November 23, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 23-8 JORDAN.

does not appear promising.”³⁶⁹ In an effort to bring Israel back in line and to shore up King Hussein’s regime, the National Security Council (NSC) recommended suspending all arms shipments to Israel, delaying deliveries that were underway, and taking a firm stance in the UN against Israeli aggression.³⁷⁰ Israel was reduced to a marginal concern:

They’ve wiped the slate clean by this attack and laid low the impressive tacit arrangement we’ve built over the years to neutralize the Israeli-Jordan border. They’ve probably wiped out the King’s commitment not to station his army on the west bank. They’ve destroyed the running dialogue we had on controlling the cross-border terrorism. The King will shortly ask us for substantial quantities of military equipment and if we don’t provide it, [he] says he will go anywhere he can get it. So the Israelis have left us with a tremendous bill on our hands. We’d be entirely justified in suspending all aid to Israel simply to offset that bill.³⁷¹

While the NSC recommendation was being discussed in Washington, the situation in Jordan was deteriorating. The CIA warned of the very potential threat of a coup or assassination attempt in Jordan’s heated political atmosphere.³⁷² Not only had the Jordanian army been humiliated in the fighting against the IDF, King Hussein’s personal pride had taken a beating. In the secret contact with Israeli officials, Hussein had developed a sense of trust and understanding with the Israelis. After Samu, the king believed Israel had been dishonest from the beginning, and the raid assured him that his fear of Israeli designs on the West Bank and Jerusalem was justly founded.³⁷³ Samu shattered the king’s belief in Israel, and all direct contact broke down.³⁷⁴ His moderation toward Israel seemed to diminish, but even faced with violent opposition, Hussein vowed not to retaliate. The king believed that the only way he could reassert himself was by giving new hardware to the army.³⁷⁵ Jordan was once more approached by Soviet offers of massive military equipment at low costs, and King Hussein stated he would accept weapons from ““the devil himself”” if necessary.³⁷⁶ However, King Hussein was cautious of giving the Soviets an entrance on the already tense political scene and asked the US for a substantial increase in arms support.³⁷⁷

When the Israeli Ambassador to the US, Avraham Harman, explained in Washington the reasons for the raid, Rusk replied “what you have done in the name of your security seems in

³⁶⁹ Telegram 1535 from Embassy Amman to State Department, December 20, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL JORDAN-UAR.

³⁷⁰ Saunders to Rostow, November 16, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 337.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

³⁷² Special Memorandum by the CIA, November 18, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 338.

³⁷³ Bunch, "Strike at Samu." 61.

³⁷⁴ Saunders to Rostow, November 16, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 337.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963–68." 540.

fact to have undermined Israel's security."³⁷⁸ The rift between the US and Israel was growing, but it had not yet brought any positive consequences for Jordan, and it had not resulted in any negative consequences for Israel. The discussion on how to face up to Israel's aggression revealed that a sufficient stance would destroy the very essence of the US-Israeli relationship, a cost the administration was not willing to pay. The debate on whether or not to suspend arms deliveries to Israel finally concluded that such an announcement would have costly consequences for the pending Jordanian arms request, and by extension the entire Middle East arms support program.³⁷⁹

The initial sympathies with Jordan faded out as the US retreated to its original position of trying to appear impartial. In so doing the US signaled that aggression would not be tolerated but that it would not have any consequences for the US-Israel relationship, a lesson Israel studied thoroughly. Rusk informed the Middle East embassies that the US would not suspend deliveries and that for now, in search of other means to give Jordan psychological backing, a reply to King Hussein's request for new arms was postponed.³⁸⁰

Strengthening Jordan

The criticality of the situation in Jordan reached the administration from the US Embassy in Amman. The reports read that King Hussein was considering an all-out attack on Israel, or at least an increase in military spending which in the embassy's opinion would run the risk of political suicide or bankruptcy.³⁸¹ The Johnson administration had to quickly abandon the idea of purely psychological backing. To strengthen the king, to keep him in the Western camp, and to prevent him from attacking Israel, the administration agreed to speed up the planned delivery of arms.³⁸² On November 24, 1966 Rusk informed Hussein of the decision, but he stressed that the expedited delivery did not symbolize US approval of an increased military buildup and the equipment to be delivered would only be already agreed-upon items under contract.³⁸³

King Hussein was deeply troubled by Rusk's reluctance to expand the arms support and again sent his commander in chief, General Amer Kammash, to Washington to emphasize that

³⁷⁸ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, November 22, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 343.

³⁷⁹ State Department to Certain Posts, November 22, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 344.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁸¹ Wriggins to President Johnson, November 23, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 346.

³⁸² State Department to Embassy Amman, November 24, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 347.

³⁸³ State Department to Embassy Amman, November 24, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 347; Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963-68." 540.

Jordan and indeed Hussein himself needed American arms to survive in the Western camp. Kammash met Rusk on November 29, 1966 and said that Jordan's defense needs were more acute than they had been at any time in King Hussein's reign and that the king would rather risk death at war against Israel than having to fight his own people.³⁸⁴ The newly appointed Ambassador to Jordan, Findley Burns Jr., had warned the king that an attack on Israel would mean suicide and not preserve his regime at all, but the king had replied, "I know that, but there could come a point when I would say to hell with the regime. Let's go down fighting our enemies instead of our own people."³⁸⁵ Rusk said the US was deeply concerned for the stability of Jordan and that Israel's attack on Samu had no sympathy in the US, but the US did not agree with King Hussein's suspicion of Israel's ambitions for the West Bank. Rusk expressed sympathy with Jordan's renewed arms request but said that an expansion of arms support was a decision that could not be taken hastily.³⁸⁶

Rostow suggested putting together a symbolic arms package in order to bolster King Hussein's domestic position, but he did not acknowledge an Israeli plot on the West Bank. Rostow therefore suggested a limited arms package comprised of some minor additions to items already under contract.³⁸⁷ The Joint Chiefs concurred that a full compliance with Kammash's request was out of the question, but they too recommended an expedited delivery of arms that could serve as a deterrent against future Israeli retaliations and give Jordan more effective measures to curb Fatah operations into Israel.³⁸⁸ While the limited package was under discussion, Israel raised objections to a sudden increase in Jordan's arsenal, however limited, and said it would disrupt the delicate military balance on the border. Rostow stated that "we are only picking up the pieces in a mess they created" and rejected the Israeli complaints.³⁸⁹

It was not only Israel's possible interest in the West Bank which worried King Hussein. The Palestinian population on the West Bank flocked to the Egyptian-supported leadership of the PLO, which many Palestinians now saw as a viable alternative to Hashemite rule.³⁹⁰ Israel's

³⁸⁴ State Department to Embassy Amman, November 29, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 352.

³⁸⁵ Telegram 1220 from Embassy Amman to State Department, November 23, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964-1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 23-9 JORDAN.

³⁸⁶ State Department to Embassy Amman, November 29, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 352.

³⁸⁷ Rostow to President Johnson, December 2, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 355.

³⁸⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff to McNamara, December 5, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 357.

³⁸⁹ Rostow to President Johnson, December 9, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 359.

³⁹⁰ Telegram 1162 Embassy Amman to State Department, November 19, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964-1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 23-9 JORDAN.

raid had enabled the PLO to “pose a deadly threat to [Jordan].”³⁹¹ King Hussein was deeply disturbed by the situation and on December 10, 1966 Ambassador Burns was called to meet King Hussein in his private residence.³⁹² Throughout the meeting the king had tears in his eyes, and Burns reported that he was on the brink of breakdown. The king had contemplated his alternatives if the US could not help him. The first was to turn east, but Hussein stated that “[i]f in the end Jordan feels she must turn to the East, it would have to be under someone else, not with me.”³⁹³ The second alternative was to attack those who opposed the legitimacy of his rule, meaning Egypt and Syria. Although he reportedly expressed no concern for his own life in such an event, he said he did not have the resources to carry it through. The third and most appealing option for Hussein was to declare the West Bank a semi-autonomous region under military government and call upon all Arab states to take an active part in protecting the area.³⁹⁴

The West Bank was the monument of his grandfather’s legacy and housed the majority of Jordan’s industry, and it is unlikely that King Hussein would have gone through with such a plan.³⁹⁵ However, it would allow him to distribute the blame to all Arab states and the Palestinians themselves in the event Israel raided again.³⁹⁶ It would thereby stifle the criticism against his regime as he would not have the sole responsibility to protect the West Bank and its citizens. Moreover, it would complicate Israeli attempts to seize the West Bank, which King Hussein sincerely believed it wanted.³⁹⁷ Hussein acknowledged that the alternative was unattractive and stressed the need for a favorable reply to his arms request which would obviate the need for carrying it through. Burns picked up signs that the king nursed a growing sense of suspicion of the US. King Hussein inquired if the US did not realize “the seriousness of the situation” or the “potent desires of others to ... liquidate Jordan?”³⁹⁸ Was there in fact nothing more Johnson could do to relax Israel’s aggression? King Hussein was probably closer to the truth than he realized when he, according to Burns, said, “we are so closely tied

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Embassy Amman to State Department, December 11, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 362.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Bunch, "Strike at Samu." 66; Avi Shlaim, "Jordan: Walking the Tight Rope," in *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, ed. Wm Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 124.

³⁹⁶ Bunch, "Strike at Samu." 66.

³⁹⁷ Ibid. 66.

³⁹⁸ Embassy Amman to State Department, December 11, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Document 362.

to Israel, and the Israelis can generate such pressure on us, that this is a powerful inhibiting factor in our ability to respond to the King's request for assistance."³⁹⁹

Burns' cautions were heeded. On December 13, 1966 McNamara informed Kammash of the expedited delivery of an arms package which now included riot control equipment, fifteen vehicles with mounted machine guns, one hundred recoilless rifles and five F-104 Starfighters.⁴⁰⁰ Kammash was still not impressed and said the loyalty of the army was in question: "The Jordan Army was humiliated by the raid of November 13 and this has caused the people of Jordan to view the Army with suspicion; it has also caused the Army to question King Hussein's leadership and his policy of moderation toward Israel."⁴⁰¹

The attempt to salvage the American image of impartiality was too little and too late to persuade King Hussein that Israel did not take precedence over Jordan in the US Middle East policy.⁴⁰² Nonetheless, by December 21, 1966 the terms of the limited arms package was successfully negotiated.⁴⁰³ The Jordanian air force did not have adequate training or the necessary facilities for maintaining the new aircraft. Moreover, there were no Jordanian airmen trained to pilot the five F-104 Starfighters which were hastily delivered ahead of schedule during the first few months of 1967.⁴⁰⁴ Although the package was far less than what he had hoped for and putting aside the fact that the aircraft would remain out of operation for some time, King Hussein believed the dramatic effects of an express arms airlift would help restore the loyalty of his army.⁴⁰⁵ Although the US tried to reiterate Israel's assurances that the West Bank was of no interest to them, Hussein's belief that Israel in fact had changed its policies had taken deep roots.⁴⁰⁶

No Calm before the Storm

Israel claimed that the effects of the raid on Samu had been unintentional, and American officials hoped for a change in Israel's reaction to infiltrations. However, tensions on the borders still spurred domestic pressure on the Israeli government to continue the policy of retaliation. The Syrian border caused the most difficult and most pressing issues as 1967

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Handley to Under-Secretary Ball, November, 25, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964-1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 23-8 JORDAN.

⁴⁰¹ Memorandum of Conversation, December 13, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 367

⁴⁰² Bunch, "Strike at Samu." 61-62.

⁴⁰³ Embassy Amman to State Department, December 22, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 373.

⁴⁰⁴ Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963-68." 541.

⁴⁰⁵ Embassy Amman to State Department, December 22, 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 373.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

began, but in contrast to the secrecy around the raid on Samu, the Israeli government now warned the US that it would soon be forced to act against Syria. Rostow acknowledged that a successful restraining effort on Israel meant putting the US-Israel relationship on the line, which both he and Johnson wanted to avoid.⁴⁰⁷ Unwilling to risk domestic criticism by taking a harder line on Israel, the Johnson administration was thereby left without any means to dissuade Israel from retaliations. On January 17, 1967 Israel informed the US that the government, with great indignation, had called off a retaliatory strike after Syrian infiltrators had killed one Israeli and opened fire on Israeli vessels on Lake Tiberias in the north.⁴⁰⁸ The US was unaware of the fact that Israel was responsible for nearly 80 percent of the fighting in the border areas, by provoking the Syrians to open fire and then attacking with large-scale operations.⁴⁰⁹ The US therefore praised Israel for its brave policy of restraint and asked Israel to draw the same conclusion the US had:

We believe that the evidence from years past demonstrates that military retaliation is not the answer to this problem. We have already seen enough of the present pattern of events in the Middle East to realize that armed reprisals not only fail to put a halt to terrorism, but on the contrary, strengthen the radical and irresponsible forces in the Arab societies that provide a favorable climate for terrorist activities.⁴¹⁰

To improve its border patrol capability, Israel approached the US for 200 armored personnel carriers (APCs) in January 1967.⁴¹¹ The Joint Chiefs informed McNamara that even with the expedited deliveries of arms and aircraft to Jordan, there was no reason the US should accommodate the request. Another arms sale to Israel would only escalate the tensions on the border and also discredit America's support to King Hussein.⁴¹² In fact, the Joint Chiefs stated that for the next four to five years Israel had the defensive strength to withstand any attack from any Arab state or a collective attack by all of them.⁴¹³ Moreover, Israel had several times brushed away the American team of inspectors it had agreed to allow visit the Dimona reactor.⁴¹⁴ With that in mind, the Department of Defense advised against selling the APCs. The State Department could accept selling one hundred APCs, but only if Israel accepted

⁴⁰⁷ Rostow to President Johnson, January 16, 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 380.

⁴⁰⁸ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, January 17, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 382.

⁴⁰⁹ Interviews with Israeli military chief of staff, Moshe Dayan, published in 1997 after his death, revealed that Israel had deliberately provoked "more than 80 percent" of the clashes on the Syrian border. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 235–236.

⁴¹⁰ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, January 17, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Document 382.

⁴¹¹ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, January 18, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 383; Rostow to President Johnson, March 15, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 395.

⁴¹² Joint Chiefs of Staff to McNamara, February 2, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 18, Document 387.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁴ Lazarowitz, "Different Approaches to a Regional Search for Balance." 39.

periodic inspection.⁴¹⁵ If that could not be guaranteed, the State Department would vote against furnishing Israel's request.⁴¹⁶

Rostow sided with Rusk and McNamara, but he was a pragmatist and reintroduced the periodic inspection of Israel's nuclear reactor into the US-Israel relationship. Rostow advised Johnson that Israel should officially declare the peaceful intent of their nuclear program before the US would offer them additional military hardware: "So far the Israelis have succeeded in keeping this apart from the rest of our relationship."⁴¹⁷ Rostow stated that "Israel has never leveled with us on its nuclear intent... But we know enough to be seriously concerned."⁴¹⁸ In the end, Israel grudgingly accepted American inspectors to the Dimona reactor. On May 8, 1967 the inspectors reported back finding no evidence of an Israeli nuclear weapons program, but Rostow cautioned that "there are enough unanswered questions to make us want to avoid getting locked in too closely with Israel."⁴¹⁹ Rostow still warned against the sale of APCs, and he relayed the State Department's concerns for American oil interests in the region and "our obligations to our Arab friends."⁴²⁰ However, even Rostow's pragmatic influence and understanding for the domestic concerns could not prevent Israel from keeping nuclear issues out of the US-Israel relationship: On May 23, 1967 Johnson approved the sale of one hundred APCs to Israel, once more without a formal agreement on periodic inspections of the Dimona reactor.⁴²¹

The raid on Samu marked a severe change in King Hussein's assessments of Israel. Having kept back-channel meetings with Israeli officials since 1963, the king sincerely believed that Israel supported his regime and that a stable Jordan was in Israel's interest. After the raid on Samu, all Hussein's trust in Israel vanished. In the king's view, Israel had betrayed Jordan and eliminated all hopes of peaceful coexistence, and the raid also drove Hussein to question the US and its policies. President Johnson's domestic dilemma was that a pro-Israel policy could generate popularity whereas a pro-Jordan policy brought only negative domestic consequences. Unwilling, unable, or both, the US failure to address the problems between Israel and Jordan allowed the situation to disrupt the *status quo*. Jordan had lost its silent supporter in Israel, and American support was not nearly as strong as the king felt he needed.

⁴¹⁵ Rostow to President Johnson, March 15, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 395.

⁴¹⁶ Rostow to President Johnson, April 18, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 406.

⁴¹⁷ Rostow to President Johnson, April 20, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 407.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁹ Rostow to President Johnson, May 8, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, Document 416.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ *Ibid.* See footnote 6.

Faced with intense criticism from Egypt and Syria, King Hussein could no longer afford to stand alone as the only moderate on Israel's border. However reluctantly, the king felt forced to look around for new friends. He came to believe that closer alignment with Nasser was in his own and in Jordan's best interest.⁴²²

⁴²² Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 234–237.

Chapter 5: Loss of Options

A brief period of stability followed in the wake of Samu, but Israeli insecurity was soon again accentuated when Syrian-sponsored Fatah infiltrators stepped up their campaign and launched a large number of infiltrations into Israel.⁴²³ Continued infiltration reaffirmed Israel's reliance on reprisals, and the Arab states had started pointing fingers at each other for not resisting Israeli reprisals. Once more the Arab rivalry troubled King Hussein. The large riots in the wake of Samu had demonstrated public support for more forceful opposition against Israel.⁴²⁴ Although the raid had destroyed the *de facto* peace with Israel and made the Jordanian people increasingly receptive to calls for confrontation against Israel, King Hussein still did not share Egypt and Syria's calls for Israel's destruction.⁴²⁵ After all, Jordan's army units had been badly humiliated by the Israeli Defense Forces in the short battle for Samu.⁴²⁶

Syria was for some time alone in pressing for Arab action against Israel.⁴²⁷ Although it had been limited, the American assistance in the wake of Samu enabled King Hussein to disregard Syria's aggressive propaganda, but Hussein's longtime rival in Nasser intensified his criticism of Jordan's permissiveness toward Israel.⁴²⁸ However, American support of King Hussein was absent when in the late spring of 1967 Egypt finally committed to Syria's position. Unwilling to risk isolation and uncertain of American support, Hussein eventually believed his position could best be preserved by Nasser's side. The US suddenly faced a united Arab world, firmly committed to action against Israel. Johnson faced a question of the primacy of policy pillars that potentially could unveil his administration's image of impartiality.

How did the US face the challenge when strategic interests directly opposed the American sympathy and commitment to Israel? Why did the US keep to the sidelines when tensions were rising, and how did that affect the US-Jordan relationship? What consequences did the American distance have for a postwar settlement between Israel and King Hussein?

⁴²³ Waage, *Konflikt Og Stormaktspolitikk I Midtøsten*. 335–337.

⁴²⁴ Telegram 1359 from Embassy Amman to State Department, December 2, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 23-9 JORDAN.

⁴²⁵ Shlaim, "Jordan: Walking the Tight Rope." 99.

⁴²⁶ Telegram 1359 from Embassy Amman to State Department, December 2, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 23-9 JORDAN; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 236.

⁴²⁷ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 235; Airgram A-240 from Embassy Amman to State Department, December 12, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL JORDAN-UAR.

⁴²⁸ Airgram A-240 from Embassy Amman to State Department, December 12, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL JORDAN-UAR.

Rising Tension in the Arab Rivalry

Although Jordan had been largely sidelined after Samu, Arab unity was on a high tide during 1967, but it was Syria rather than Egypt that had become the most vocal advocate for action against Israel. In the wake of Samu, Nasser launched a propaganda campaign against Jordan in an attempt to reassert his supremacy in the Arab world, but during the spring of 1967, Syria still wielded the heaviest appeal among Jordan's Palestinians. On the Syrian border, Israel provoked the Syrians by ordering Israeli vehicles into the demilitarized zone, and when the Syrians eventually opened fire, Israel then had an excuse to launch attacks.⁴²⁹ Contrary to what Syria hoped Nasser was reluctant to extend support against Israeli reprisals. As a result, the driving force behind Arab nationalism was gradually losing his primacy in the inter-Arab rivalry.⁴³⁰ Nasser's reticent position enabled King Hussein to resist the aggressive propaganda, but the riots after Samu had left Hussein even more cautious of Arab nationalist influence in Jordan.⁴³¹

Syria realized its sponsorship of the Fatah guerilla and the border skirmishes could very well lead to a full-scale Israeli attack. It therefore secured Egypt on its side. On November 4, 1966 Syria and Egypt signed a defense treaty to the widespread applause of the Palestinians and Arabs.⁴³² However, Nasser was reluctant to accept Syria's propaganda for an all-out attack on Israel. He believed that before any action against Israel could have any chance of success, the Arab armies had to equal Israel's military strength, and there had to be firm unity in the Arab armies.⁴³³ As he time and again stayed his hand, Nasser drew heavy criticism from his defense partner in Syria.⁴³⁴ Similar to the situation in Jordan, Egypt too was under increasing nationalist pressure, and rather than containing Syria's aggression, Nasser was being moved by it.⁴³⁵

When Nasser stayed his hand while Israeli fighters in April 1967 shot down six Syrian aircraft near Damascus, Syria and Egypt clashed.⁴³⁶ The internal struggle between Syria pressing for

⁴²⁹ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 235–236.

⁴³⁰ Airgram A-161 from Embassy Amman to State Department, November 1, 1966. NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL JORDAN-UAR.

⁴³¹ Telegram 91425 from State Department to Embassy Amman, November, 25, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1964–1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 23-8 JORDAN.

⁴³² Waage, *Konflikt Og Stormaktspolitikk I Midtøsten*. 340.

⁴³³ Shlaim, "Jordan: Walking the Tight Rope." 105; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 235.

⁴³⁴ David W. Lesch, "Syria: Playing with Fire," in *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 84.

⁴³⁵ Laura M. James, "Egypt: Dangerous Illusions," in *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 59.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.* 57.

an ill-considered attack and Nasser's urging for restraint only strengthened Syria's leadership in the rivalry between them. It led to massive criticism throughout the Arab world against Egypt's inaction, and King Hussein used the opportunity to declare Nasser no better than himself when directly faced with Israeli aggression.⁴³⁷ Nasser's prestige was in rapid decline. To shore up his position as the leading figure in the Arab world, Nasser took a series of steps that neither he nor Hussein eventually could resist the consequences of.⁴³⁸ Hussein felt forced to jump on Nasser's bandwagon in order to secure his own position when Nasser embarked on "brinkmanship that went over the brink".⁴³⁹

The first step toward the brink was taken when the Soviet Union falsely reported of Israeli troop movement on the Syrian border in mid-May 1967. Nasser saw an opportunity to seize control of the events and ordered the evacuation of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) stationed in the Sinai Desert since the Suez War in 1956.⁴⁴⁰ Shortly after, Egyptian troops reoccupied the Sinai and were ordered to dig in without any international buffer force between them and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).⁴⁴¹ It was a step designed to demonstrate Egyptian support to Syria in the event Israel did plan to attack, but also to reassert Egypt as the leading force in the Arab world. As Nasser seemed to be preparing for war against Israel, King Hussein had to face up to challenging considerations of whether to oppose or to join Nasser.⁴⁴² Opposition meant dissociation and criticism from his own people who were "swept along with the rising tide of Arab nationalism."⁴⁴³ Joining Nasser would strengthen Hussein's shattered popularity among Jordanians, Palestinians, and foreign Arabs alike, but it potentially implied facing a superior Israel in battle.⁴⁴⁴ It took another two weeks before Hussein made his decision.

Israel was alarmed by Nasser's move, and having demonstrated its unilateralism at Samu, Washington worried of the sudden escalation of tension. The American Embassy in Cairo reported that the Egyptian buildup on Israel's southern border was an attempt to demonstrate support to Syria and not aimed at an attack on Israel.⁴⁴⁵ The embassy reported that Egypt

⁴³⁷ Shlaim, "Jordan: Walking the Tight Rope." 106.

⁴³⁸ Ibid. 106.

⁴³⁹ Ibid. 106.

⁴⁴⁰ Waage, *Konflikt Og Stormaktspolitikk I Midtøsten*. 341.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid. 342.

⁴⁴² Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 236.

⁴⁴³ Shlaim, "Jordan: Walking the Tight Rope." 106.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid. 106.

⁴⁴⁵ Embassy Cairo to State Department, May 16, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIX *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967* (hereafter Vol. 19), Document 5.

would not be the first to attack Israel, but if Israel attacked another Arab state, Egypt might intervene.⁴⁴⁶ The State Department relayed the report to Israel along with American intelligence estimates which reassured that Egypt's positions were defensive in nature. In spite of American reassurances, Israel, attempting to persuade the administration that Nasser threatened Israel's security, continuously sent conflicting intelligence estimates to Washington.⁴⁴⁷ Rostow was aware that the Arab rivalry would force Egypt to take action if Israel retaliated against Syrian-sponsored infiltrations:

[Nasser's] brinkmanship stems from two causes: (1) The Syrians are feeding Cairo erroneous reports of Israeli mobilization to strike Syria. Regrettably, some pretty militant public threats from Israel by Eshkol and others have lent credibility to the Syrian reports. (2) Nasser probably feels his prestige would suffer irreparably if he failed a third time to come to the aid of an Arab nation attacked by Israel.⁴⁴⁸

The gravity of the situation was critical, but Rostow cautioned that it might very well be an Israeli raid on Syria that would drag in Egypt and ignite a full-scale war.⁴⁴⁹ Johnson urged Eshkol to avoid retaliation against the infiltrations and cautioned that unilateral action had no support from his administration.⁴⁵⁰

The riots and unrest after Samu made King Hussein believe that he would have to commit to the Arab camp, however radical it turned out, if another showdown was forced on him.⁴⁵¹ The king wanted to avoid being dragged into an armed confrontation with Israel, because the present turmoil provided perfect cover "for an Israeli attack on anyone of their choosing."⁴⁵² Hussein was referring to his suspicion that Israel wanted to acquire the West Bank, but the question was whether the fear of losing a battle against Israel would outweigh the fear of being scapegoated by Egypt if he did nothing. In a meeting with US Ambassador Findley Burns Jr. in Amman on May 18, 1967, the king said that if Israel attacked Syria, and if Egypt did not attack Israel, then Jordan would stay out of the matter. However, Hussein believed Nasser would not risk discontent and criticism by not attacking and said that when Egypt intervened, Jordan would have to take action in order to avoid domestic unrest and foreign criticism.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Roland Popp, "Stumbling Decidedly into the Six-Day War," *Middle East Journal* 60, no. 2 (2006). 300.

⁴⁴⁸ Rostow to President Johnson, May 17, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 7.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, May 17, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 8.

⁴⁵¹ Telegram 1220 from Embassy Amman to State Department, November 23, 1966, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1964-1966: PD, Box 2389, Folder POL 23-9 JORDAN.

⁴⁵² Embassy Amman to State Department, May 18, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 12.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

Burns tried to persuade King Hussein to stay his hand even if fighting ensued and said the US had no evidence of Israeli plans to attack Jordan nor did it have any interest in the West Bank. The king was by no means reassured. In addition to the fear of being scapegoated, King Hussein sincerely feared that Israel in any case would attack Jordan to seize the West Bank. Hussein inquired what the US would do if his hypothesis proved accurate. Could he count on American support against an Israeli capture of the West Bank? Burns said any alteration of borders by force would be opposed by the US, but the form of opposition would only be considered if the situation arose. Uncertain of the credibility of American support and unwilling to allow Israel to capture the West Bank, Hussein sought to avoid a confrontation with Israel above all. Nonetheless, the king still feared Nasser's criticism and domestic opposition more than a loss against Israel, and Burns reported that if push came to shove, Hussein was intent on supporting Nasser.⁴⁵⁴

Preserving the Image of Impartiality

Burns' report was not observed by most US policymakers until May 30, 1967. Some of the reason lay in part with the deteriorating campaign in Vietnam which overshadowed the situation in the Middle East.⁴⁵⁵ In the weeks leading up to the Six Day War, the Johnson administration's focus was to avoid Israel from dragging the US into in another issue of the same magnitude.⁴⁵⁶ In Middle East policy it seems that the preservation of the image of impartiality for the sake of the image of impartiality was the most important issue for the administration. Preserving the relationship with Jordan or alleviating the threat Israel perceived itself to be under was reduced to secondary concerns.⁴⁵⁷

On May 19, 1967 the US Embassy in Israel reported that American reassurances of the defensive nature of Nasser's troops in the Sinai had fallen on "deaf ears" in Tel Aviv.⁴⁵⁸ Ambassador Barbour reported that Israel seemed to only consider unilateral action:

I have put to them in strong terms [the] importance [that] they keep their nerve and not do anything in their anxiety to heat up the situation further. I have gone so far as to say that their professed frustration at this development and apparent fright of [Egypt's] force now facing

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ The battle of Khe Sanh between January and July 1967 "assumed a symbolic importance beyond its actual value" and Johnson struggled with domestic opposition, but still ordered the largest bombing campaign thus far in the Vietnam War to demonstrate resolve. Rusk, *As I Saw It*. 415.

⁴⁵⁶ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*. 111; Rusk, *As I Saw It*. 330.

⁴⁵⁷ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*. 111.

⁴⁵⁸ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, May 19, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 18.

them, which although large is obviously not of invasion magnitude, is giving me qualms as to their own strictly defensive intentions.⁴⁵⁹

Time was needed to find a peaceful solution to the crisis, but already on May 22, 1967 Nasser closed off the Strait of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba to all ships under Israeli flag and carrying goods to or from Israel.⁴⁶⁰ He had taken the second step toward the brink. Secretary of State Dean Rusk realized that in Israeli eyes at least, this was a just cause for a preemptive strike. In the aftermath of the Suez Crisis in 1957, Israel declared that infringements on its right to free passage of international waters would be interpreted as declarations of war.⁴⁶¹ The US shared Israel's understanding of the international status of the Gulf of Aqaba and the Strait of Tiran and agreed that the waters should be open to passage for ships of all nations.⁴⁶² The US did not, however, view it as a just cause for war. Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and Walt Rostow's brother, Eugene Rostow, tried to dissuade Israel from losing its nerve: "We share your concern about reports that [Egyptian] troops have taken up positions at Sharm-el-Sheikh... [but] recall that I pointed out that the presence of [Egyptian] troops on [Egyptian] territory is not in itself illegal."⁴⁶³ Under-Secretary Rostow, though personally vehemently pro-Israel, warned that⁴⁶⁴

My Government is proceeding in this matter ... on the basis that Israel will take no unilateral military action at any time. Military operations at this time, in our view, may well lead to general hostilities in the area. We are convinced that the issue of the Strait of Tiran must be handled as an international matter.⁴⁶⁵

The CIA observed on May 23 that neither side in the Middle East wanted war, but also that neither party supported peace too vigorously. Even Jordan, which had been taught the devastating military precision of the IDF at Samu, was intent on attacking Israel if asked to. Interestingly, the CIA in briefing the administration did not mention Jordan's intentions.⁴⁶⁶ The CIA merely reported that "the danger lies in the fact that the leaders on each side are being moved by the chain of events, rather than controlling those events at this point... war can now come from accident, incident, or miscalculation."⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Waage, *Konflikt Og Stormaktspolitikk I Midtøsten*. 342–343.

⁴⁶¹ Shlaim, "Israel: Poor Little Samson." 27.

⁴⁶² State Department to Embassy Cairo, May 22, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 35.

⁴⁶³ Under-Secretary Rostow to Harman, May 22, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 36.

⁴⁶⁴ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*. 110–111.

⁴⁶⁵ Under-Secretary Rostow to Harman, May 22, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 36.

⁴⁶⁶ Notes for Director of Central Intelligence Helms, May 23, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 45.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

Israel too was preoccupied with Egypt and Syria and did not contemplate that a strike on Egypt could force King Hussein to join a war. When Israel once more presented an inflated estimate of Egypt's military strength, Walt Rostow disregarded the report as "a gambit intended to influence the US to ...provide military supplies... make more public commitments to Israel [and]...approve Israeli military initiatives."⁴⁶⁸ In America's eyes, such moves would only accelerate Israel's belief in unilateral action that could possibly force the US to join a war on Israel's side. The top priority was to dissuade Israel from a preemptive strike and to preserve the image of impartiality. On May 25, 1967 Barbour reported from Tel Aviv that Israel now believed a strike by Syria and Egypt was imminent, and that Israel's Foreign Minister Abba Eban was sent on a mission to Washington with instructions to pressure for an American declaration of support or at least an approval of an Israeli first strike.⁴⁶⁹ Barbour said Israel's intelligence held that the "Egyptians and Syrians [are] no longer concerned with Aqaba but [are] prepared to launch full scale attack against Israeli existence."⁴⁷⁰

Secretary of State Dean Rusk met Eban in Washington early in the morning of May 25, 1967, and Rusk said the US did not "really support the belief that an attack by [Egypt] and Syria is imminent."⁴⁷¹ After thorough examination of the Israeli intelligence reports there was no doubt within Johnson's administration that the inflated Israeli estimates were an attempt to secure American approval for unilateral action that in the US assessment would lead to war.⁴⁷² Still, there was no mention of King Hussein's intention to join such a war. Even so, Rusk said the US could not "give assurance along the lines of "an attack on you is an attack on us""⁴⁷³ Eban was disappointed and stressed that Israel was forced to strike or surrender if Rusk could not reassure him of American support.⁴⁷⁴ Neither Rusk nor Secretary of Defense McNamara, whom Eban met an hour later, was at all willing to allow Israel to take action that could jeopardize American interests in the Arab world. McNamara stuck to Rusk's line and declared that "Israel should realize that an Israeli attack under present circumstances would

⁴⁶⁸ Rostow to President Johnson, May 25, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 61.

⁴⁶⁹ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, May 25, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 63.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ Memorandum of Conversation, May 25, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 64.

⁴⁷² Popp, "Stumbling Decidedly into the Six-Day War." 302.

⁴⁷³ Memorandum of Conversation, May 25, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 64.

⁴⁷⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, May 26, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 69.

have most serious consequences. We cannot undertake to support Israel if Israel launches an attack.”⁴⁷⁵

Stalling

In preparation for Johnson’s meeting with Eban, scheduled for the next day, Rusk delivered a briefing paper that mentioned two options for Johnson: either ““unleash”” Israel, which Rusk strongly opposed, or firmly commit to a British-sponsored maritime convoy designed to challenge and reopen the blockade of the strait.⁴⁷⁶ Rusk supported Britain’s plan for a naval task force, but he believed Eban needed “something pretty solid to hold the line against his hawks.”⁴⁷⁷ Since Israel had “absolutely no faith in the possibility of anything useful coming out of the U.N”, Rusk believed the US would have to unilaterally commit to reopening the strait if Eban should be persuaded.⁴⁷⁸ Unilateral action was unattractive because challenging a united Arab world threatened to reveal the strategic veil of the American impartiality, and there was a daunting possibility of direct confrontation with Egypt. The British-sponsored plan for a multilateral naval task force opted for international cover and was designed to secure the rights of free passage through international waters. Rusk advised Johnson to inform Eban that Israel had to await the results of the planned naval task force, and that if Israel acted prematurely the US would offer neither political nor military assistance.⁴⁷⁹

At a National Security Council meeting just prior to President Johnson’s meeting with Eban on May 26, 1967, Rusk’s suggestion met resistance from Supreme Court Justice and President Johnson’s close friend, Abe Fortas. Fortas was ardently pro-Israel, and his advice on Middle East policy had long since enjoyed Johnson’s close attention.⁴⁸⁰ Justice Fortas questioned if Johnson had the luxury of stepping aside even if Israel acted on its own, but Johnson was non-responsive to Fortas’ advice that the US should utilize “whatever force necessary” to reopen the Strait.⁴⁸¹ Johnson ruled out unilateral American action, but since the naval task force still was only on the drawing board, Fortas believed that even if Israel acted preemptively the

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Rusk to President Johnson, May 26, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 71.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Rusk to President Johnson, May 26, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 71; Quandt, *Peace Process*. 34.

⁴⁸⁰ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*. 109.

⁴⁸¹ Memorandum for the Record, May 26, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 72; Quandt, *Peace Process*. 34.

President had a moral obligation to stand by his commitments.⁴⁸² If nothing came of the UN or Britain's naval convoy, the US had, in Fortas' view, a responsibility to accept a preemptive attack by Israel.⁴⁸³

The discussion on what Johnson should tell Eban shifted from supporting the State Department's desire to preserve the strategic interests, and the White House's desire to support Israel.⁴⁸⁴ Johnson decided to heed Rusk's caution and did not risk sacrificing the strategic veil of his administration's impartiality. An impartial approach was still the preferred policy, but the administration would conceal its effort to serve Israel's interests from a safe distance under international cover. After several reschedules Johnson finally met with Eban late on the evening of May 26.⁴⁸⁵ Johnson twice repeated the sentence Rusk had coined in the briefing paper: "Israel will not be alone unless it decides to go alone."⁴⁸⁶ Johnson read from Rusk's briefing paper and said the UN "has not yet demonstrated what it may or may not be able or willing to do although the United States will press for prompt action in the UN."⁴⁸⁷

Eban returned to Israel with a warning that if Israel went alone, the US would not intervene militarily on its side, even if Israel could not handle the situation on its own. If Israel kept its nerve, however, the US could offer help either through the UN or a naval convoy. The question is whether it also implied that the US would not oppose Israel's action if Israel went alone and the campaign went well. The ambiguity of Johnson's warning incorporated the State Department's opposition, and Johnson's reluctant approval, of an Israeli first strike.⁴⁸⁸ Coupled with Johnson's subtle warning against a preemptive strike, a message from Moscow added importance to preventing premature Israeli action. A Soviet message to Washington read, "[s]hould Israel commit aggression ... then we will render aid to those countries that are subjected to aggression."⁴⁸⁹ Accordingly, Rusk instructed Barbour to seek out Eshkol "at once whatever the hour or the circumstances ... even if the Cabinet is sitting."⁴⁹⁰ It is possible that

⁴⁸² Rostow had informed President Johnson on May 19, 1967 that his earlier statements amounted to a "commitment ... to prevent Israel from being destroyed and ... to stop aggression—either through the UN or on our own", Rostow to President Johnson, May 19, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 20.

⁴⁸³ Quandt, *Peace Process*. 35–36.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 34.

⁴⁸⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, May 26, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 77.

⁴⁸⁶ Draft Statement, May 26, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 74; Memorandum of Conversation, May 26, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 77.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ During the days after the President's meeting with Eban, there was "a gradual shift on Johnson's part from supporting Rusk's "red light" views to siding with Fortas". Quandt, *Peace Process*. 34.

⁴⁸⁹ Kosygin to President Johnson, May 27, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 84.

⁴⁹⁰ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, May 27, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 86.

it was the Soviet message which enabled Barbour to report on late May 28 that “they have decided not to go to war at this time.”⁴⁹¹

The administration hoped Israel had decided to await the UN’s results and the naval convoy. However, Israel’s impression of being under imminent threat was rapidly accelerated when King Hussein and Nasser signed a mutual defense treaty on May 30, 1967. The negotiations of the treaty were done simply by replacing the word Syria with the word Jordan in the existing Egypt-Syria defense treaty.⁴⁹² The treaty was negotiated, signed and announced within a few hours in Cairo. Jordan did not have any credible assurance of American support, and paired with his suspicions about Israel’s expansionist ambitions on the West Bank, an alliance with Egypt was a logical solution for King Hussein.⁴⁹³ Even though the treaty reassigned control over the army from Hussein to an Egyptian general, and committed Jordan to open a front against Israel in the event of an attack, it also provided Hussein with a guarantee that Egypt would support his position on the West Bank. Nasser had given a promise that the US had failed to deliver. Moreover, King Hussein’s new course turned the public unrest after Samu into widespread popular support.⁴⁹⁴

In Israel, the Jordanian-Egyptian treaty represented another justification for preemptive action.⁴⁹⁵ Eshkol declared to Washington that “a point is being approached at which counsels to Israel will lack any moral or logical basis.”⁴⁹⁶ With yet another threat to its existence, Eshkol and Israel could no longer be dissuaded from launching an attack. Eshkol declared that the “time is ripe for confronting Nasser with a more intense and effective policy of resistance.”⁴⁹⁷

For the time being Israel reluctantly abided by the American request to let the naval task force take shape. Although Burns nearly two weeks earlier had reported Jordan’s intention to side with Egypt in case of war, it seems it was the Jordanian-Egyptian treaty which finally brought the unification of the Arab world to the attention of the highest levels of the administration. The NSC suddenly questioned the wisdom of aiming to reopen the strait, because challenging Nasser directly opposed a unified Arab world wherein economic and geopolitical interests

⁴⁹¹ Rostow to President Johnson, May 28, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 89.

⁴⁹² Shlaim, "Jordan: Walking the Tight Rope." 107.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.* 103.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 108–109.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 110.

⁴⁹⁶ Diplomatic Note from Harman to Rusk, May 30, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 102.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

rested. The NSC cautioned that the persistent US push to open the strait would demonstrate Israel's preeminence over the demands of a now united Arab world.⁴⁹⁸ The NSC warned that "[i]nstead of staking our bets on an evenhanded relationship with the Arabs—moderate and radical alike—and the Israelis, we are now committed to a course that will more likely than not lead us into a head-on clash with a temporarily united Arab world."⁴⁹⁹ The NSC did, however, present an option that could salvage the image of impartiality:

*The other choice is still to let the Israelis do this job themselves. Eshkol himself says he'll have to go this route within a week or two if we can't produce. He's correct that we don't have any right to hold him back longer while his enemy gets stronger unless we're willing to take on the Arabs ourselves ... We ought to consider admitting that we have failed and allow fighting to ensue.*⁵⁰⁰

Reports from the American embassies in the Middle East supported that the US should at least change course. A joint communiqué from the Middle East ambassadors, including Burns in Amman, claimed that "field assessments have played no role in policy formulation," and that in spite of the "consensus [of the] most knowledgeable area experts" the current US policy "directly opposed short and especially long term US national interests in the area."⁵⁰¹ The ambassadors, far away from domestic considerations, were definitely more worried of US-Arab relations than with Israel's security. In Washington, policymakers realized the American image of impartiality was on the line if the US did not change course. The question was what course to take. Eshkol had declared that he no longer could be persuaded from acting preemptively, and now the NSC informed Johnson that he no longer could support the strait's opening without risking America's access to the interests in the Arab world.⁵⁰² What was certain was that any action aimed at only opening the strait would be "thinly veiled [as] direct US, UK intervention which destined [to] produce perilous confrontation" with the Arab states.⁵⁰³

On June 4, 1967 Walt Rostow introduced a plan to "achieve our objectives in the Middle East without an Arab-Israeli war" and "should such ... war come about, [it would] produce minimum damage to the U.S. position in the world and to our position in our own country, including continued support for the war in Viet Nam."⁵⁰⁴ Since the naval task force had only found four signatories, and in any case demonstrated that the US sided with Israel, Rostow

⁴⁹⁸ Saunders to Rostow, May 31, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 114.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.* Original italics.

⁵⁰¹ Embassy Damascus to State Department, June 1, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 117.

⁵⁰² Saunders to Rostow, May 31, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 114.

⁵⁰³ Embassy Damascus to State Department, June 1, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 117.

⁵⁰⁴ Rostow to President Johnson, June 4, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 144.

suggested simply taking their hands off the problem and stepping back.⁵⁰⁵ The room for maneuver had diminished, but Rostow declared that the “moderate Arabs—and in fact, virtually all Arabs who fear the rise of Nasser as a result of the crisis—would prefer to have him cut down by the Israelis rather than by external forces.”⁵⁰⁶ Rostow never mentioned him, but King Hussein was one such moderate. Besides, all intelligence reports reassured Johnson that Israel would win a military confrontation.⁵⁰⁷ This did not mean that Israel was authorized to act unilaterally, but Rostow acknowledged it was “wiser for the Israelis to deal with the present situation than it would be for us.”⁵⁰⁸

The Battle for the West Bank

In the early hours on June 5, 1967, only one day after Rostow had recommended stepping back, Israel launched an air attack on Egyptian airfields and within hours devastated Egypt’s aerial capacity. Egypt falsely reported that it had counterattacked and forced Israel on the defensive, and asked its allies to follow suit. Israel had hoped to avoid a clash with Jordan, but in the weeks leading up to the Six-Day War neither Israel nor the US had enabled King Hussein to withstand the pressure. Besides, Jordan was captive to its alliance with Nasser, and Hussein knew all too well the dangerous consequences of not supporting the Arab cause upon Egypt’s request.⁵⁰⁹

Moreover, Hussein was no longer in command of Jordan’s army. The Egypt-Jordan defense treaty had reassigned the chief command to an Egyptian general that was quick to order the Jordanian army into combat alongside his Egyptian countrymen. The Jordanian army answered Egypt’s call for intervention and from the West Bank launched an artillery bombardment against Israel’s positions.⁵¹⁰ Israel responded by taking out Jordan’s air force before it could leave the runway. Israel’s consequent capture of the West Bank only days later took shape as Jordan’s forces were decisively driven on the defensive by the IDF. There was no pre-approved plan to capture the territory, and Eshkol only approved of it as the IDF advanced in response to the Jordanian artillery shelling.⁵¹¹ Most of the West Bank fell to Israel on the first day of fighting, but in Jerusalem the Jordanian forces dug in and enforced

⁵⁰⁵ Only Australia and the Netherlands had given assurances to join the plan along with the US and Britain. See Rostow to President Johnson, June 4, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 144.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ Intelligence Memorandum prepared in the CIA, May 26, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 76; Ginsburgh to Rostow, June 3, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 142.

⁵⁰⁸ Rostow to President Johnson, June 4, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 144.

⁵⁰⁹ Shlaim, “Jordan: Walking the Tight Rope.” 113–114; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 238–242.

⁵¹⁰ Shlaim, “Jordan: Walking the Tight Rope.” 113.

⁵¹¹ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 244–246.

their positions while King Hussein secretly requested a ceasefire which could secure Jordanian control over the West Bank. Hussein also asked the US to intervene against Israel's "punitive" attacks on Jordanian forces.⁵¹²

The message from King Hussein was relayed to Tel Aviv later that day.⁵¹³ Rusk asked Israel to accommodate Hussein's request because the "presence of Jordan and the King has been a stabilizing influence which I do not believe the Israelis should lightly see go down the drain."⁵¹⁴ However, the US realized that Hussein would be put under heavy pressure from the other Arab states if he bailed out of the fight so soon after it had begun, and asked Israel to keep his request secret "if [the] King is to maintain control."⁵¹⁵ Despite a UN ceasefire, fighting continued in and around Jerusalem.⁵¹⁶ Both sides blamed the other for breaking it, and Israel suggested that had Jordan called for a ceasefire without intending to observe it.⁵¹⁷ In fact, the Jordanian units were ordered to dig in and accept any ceasefire while Jordan still had nominal control over parts of the West Bank.⁵¹⁸ Burns reported from Amman that Israel's "suggestion that King [is] deliberately following tactic of deception [is] hardly supportable."⁵¹⁹ Personally, however, Burns worried of the consequences of a premature ceasefire:

[Jordan] could have more difficulty maintaining law and order after a cease fire than in the absence of one... What will happen when the shattered [army] returns and tells what really happened? And what if Nasser calls for Hussein's overthrow so that Jordan can continue the battle?⁵²⁰

In America's eyes, there was a very real fear that King Hussein could be overthrown or forced to abandon his moderation forever. Rusk asked US Ambassador to Israel, Walworth Barbour, to question Israel's continued offensive: "[W]e believe [a] cease-fire must be entirely observed lest [the] Jordanian regime disintegrate immediately which we assume [is] not an

⁵¹² Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 244-246; President's Daily Brief, June 6, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 172.

⁵¹³ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, June 6, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 174.

⁵¹⁴ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, June 6, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 185.

⁵¹⁵ Telegram 208438 from State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, June 6, 1967, NARA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1966-1969: Political and Defense (hereafter CFPPF 1966-1969: PD), Box 1793, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/6/67.

⁵¹⁶ President's Daily Brief, June 7, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 186.

⁵¹⁷ Telegram 3979 from Embassy Tel Aviv, June 7, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1966-1969: PD, Box 1793, Folder POL 27ARAB-ISR 6/7/67.

⁵¹⁸ Telegram 4108 from Embassy Amman to State Department, June 6, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1966-1969: PD, Box 1793, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/6/67.

⁵¹⁹ Embassy Amman to State Department, June 7, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 191.

⁵²⁰ Telegram 4099 from Embassy Amman to State Department, June 6, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1966-1969: PD, Box 1793, Folder POL 27ARAB-ISR 6/6/67.

Israeli objective.”⁵²¹ Israel was caught off-guard by Jordan’s participation in the war and felt betrayed by the king. Israel now had no qualms about his potential removal: “Politically they would like to see his disappearance and regard whatever alternative [which] may replace him with equanimity.”⁵²² Hussein was no longer necessary to ensure Israel’s security, but after American pressure it conceded that “as of now . . . it is in their interest for Jordan to remain an entity.”⁵²³ Nonetheless, Israeli officials had been quick to grasp the opportunities inherent in their advances against Jordan. Israel had pushed to gain as much territory as possible, forcing Hussein to witness the complete withdrawal of Jordanian forces from the West Bank on June 8, 1967.⁵²⁴

The Initial Optimism

When the guns fell silent on all fronts two day later, Jordan had been overwhelmingly defeated and the West Bank was lost. The West Bank housed nearly half of Jordan’s industry and population and nearly a quarter of Jordan’s arable land.⁵²⁵ In total, the loss of the West Bank meant a loss of 40 percent of the Jordanian gross domestic product.⁵²⁶ Moreover, nearly 300,000 Palestinian refugees had fled from the West Bank to the Jordan River’s East Bank.⁵²⁷ The preliminary reports from the US Embassy in Amman, however, claimed the initial numbers to be closer to thirty thousand.⁵²⁸ The failure to realize the increased Palestinian pressure in Jordan led the US to only observe that King Hussein emerged with a peculiarly strengthened position in the Arab world. The king had faithfully fulfilled his duties toward Nasser, and he had supported Arab unity. In the vacuum of resignation and defeat which spread throughout the Arab world, the Arab rivalry, for a moment at least, no longer restrained Hussein’s room for maneuver. By a desire to regain the West Bank by any means other than war, Hussein’s moderation triumphed. Even Nasser found his position so severely shattered that he gave King Hussein his blessing for informal peace talks between Israel and the king.⁵²⁹

⁵²¹ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, June 8, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 201.

⁵²² Telegram 3988 from Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, June 7, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1966–1969: PD, Box 1793, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/7/67.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁴ Shlaim, "Jordan: Walking the Tight Rope." 119.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.* 124.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.* 124.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.* 124.

⁵²⁸ Telegram 4191 from Embassy Amman to State Department, June 9, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1966–1969: PD, Box 1794, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/9/67–6/13/67.

⁵²⁹ Shlaim, "Jordan: Walking the Tight Rope." 124–125.

Rather than immediately pressuring Israel to return the West Bank American officials saw in King Hussein's moderation and the lost prestige of Arab nationalism an opportunity to break the Arab-Israeli deadlock once and for all. In a peculiar assumption that the Arab states would be more inclined to negotiate with Israel after their humiliating defeat than they had been before the war, Johnson believed the Arab-Israeli conflict could be settled for good.⁵³⁰ The time was ripe for an end of belligerency in the Middle East. As Rostow declared, the US "must take full advantage of [the] situation in order to seek progress towards improved security both of Israel and the Arab states... certain Arab [governments] are privately not unhappy at what has happened to Nasser."⁵³¹ King Hussein's domestic position was safe, he had done all he was asked and Jordan came to be viewed as the leverage the US needed to make the Arab states enter negotiations.⁵³² The US was acutely aware that Israel would not give up its new-won security without firm guarantees that another war would not take place, but the State Department worried that Israel might seek to adjust its borders to ensure its security.⁵³³ The Israeli government had not yet stated its intentions regarding the future status of the occupied territories, and to bring the Arab states to the table the US believed Israel had to be willing to exchange land for peace.⁵³⁴

However, the *status quo* of June 11, 1967 was unquestionably in Israel's favor, and if the Arab leaders were not willing to reach a settlement, Israel could guarantee its own security without it. When Barbour replied to the State Department's inquiry as to what Israel was willing to do about the coming "violent and determined effort in the Security Council to require Israeli troop withdrawals to previous boundary lines," the US learned that the only way Israel would redeem the conquests was *after* Arab recognition.⁵³⁵ A simple return to the explosive situation before the war was in any case unattractive in America's eyes and completely out of question in Israel. The Israeli decision to temporarily hold the occupied territories as a bargaining card was accepted in Washington.⁵³⁶ Accordingly, the administration undertook to work out a formula that made sure Arab recognition would

⁵³⁰ Karp, *Missed Opportunities*. 195, 206–207.

⁵³¹ Telegram 209550 from State Department to Embassy Paris, June 8, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1966–1969: PD, Box 1793, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/8/67.

⁵³² Telegram 5654 from the Mission to the UN to State Department, June 8, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1966–1969: PD, Box 1793, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/8/67.

⁵³³ Hoopes to McNamara, June 8, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 226.

⁵³⁴ Telegram 209168 from State Department to all American Diplomatic Posts, June 8, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1966–1969: PD, Box 1793, Folder, POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/8/67.

⁵³⁵ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, June 12, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 272; State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, June 12, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 273; Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, June 13, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 277.

⁵³⁶ Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948." 240.

precede Israeli withdrawal.⁵³⁷ Johnson was in effect willing to sacrifice the American assurances of Jordan's territorial integrity in the hopes that the Arab-Israeli conflict could be settled for good.⁵³⁸

King Hussein's moderation was the most promising stepping stone on the road to a lasting peace, but the king declared, "I cannot begin unless I have public assurances from [the United States] that whatever settlement is to be reached through negotiations will not involve surrender of the West Bank."⁵³⁹ On June 12, 1967 King Hussein asked if the US could guarantee a return of the West Bank, but Burns replied, "I can promise you nothing specific."⁵⁴⁰ Still, for Hussein's interest in a return of the West Bank, Burns furthered the Jordan track in Arab-Israeli negotiations: "Hussein ... offer[s] interesting possibilities."⁵⁴¹ However, Burns believed Hussein desperately needed American support to enter negotiations, and he therefore recommended Washington to demand Israeli withdrawal only to strengthen the king's position because "Arab moderates are the only actors on the Arab side of the stage with whom we can effectively work."⁵⁴²

On June 15, 1967 Barbour reported that Israel's position regarding the occupied territories had hardened: "Their primary purpose will be to seek the removal of the restrictions on their sovereignty and existence as heretofore demonstrated by the armistice regime which never moved forward ... to peace treaties."⁵⁴³ Moreover, Israel was not willing to return the entire West Bank even for Jordanian recognition. Israel could only offer some land in exchange for full peace.⁵⁴⁴ This was bad news for King Hussein, but it emphasized that if Jordan was unwilling to talk along those lines, Israel would hold the West Bank indefinitely.⁵⁴⁵ The American consulate in Jerusalem saw little hope in forcing Israel back to the prewar boundaries: "while [we are] fully conscious of [the] urgent need to bolster [the] Arab moderates, and of US policy re territorial integrity, we must respectfully say that we feel [the]

⁵³⁷ Quandt, *Peace Process*. 46.

⁵³⁸ Charles D. Smith, "The United States and the 1967 War," in *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 182.

⁵³⁹ Telegram 4214 from Embassy Amman to State Department, June 10, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1966–1969: PD, Box 1794, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/9/67–6/13/67.

⁵⁴⁰ Telegram 4246 from Embassy Amman to State Department, June 12, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1966–1969: PD, Box 1794, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/9/67–6/13/67.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴² Telegram 4284 from Embassy Amman to State Department, June 13, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1966–1969: PD, Box 1794, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/9/67–6/13/67.

⁵⁴³ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, June 15, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19 Document 290.

⁵⁴⁴ Telegram 210844 from State Department to Embassy Luxembourg, June 13, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1966–1969: PD, Box 1794, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/9/67–6/13/67.

⁵⁴⁵ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, June 16, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 303.

proposals along [the] lines suggested [by] Amman ... are wholly unrealistic at this time.”⁵⁴⁶ In the consulate’s view it was difficult “to see any power (aside from Soviet armed power, which we all hope will not be applied) that could force them out in the foreseeable future.”⁵⁴⁷

King Hussein on the Moderate Path

King Hussein was invited to meet with President Johnson in Washington, where he arrived on June 28, 1967.⁵⁴⁸ The King clearly understood that the Arab world was at a turning point. It could reach a settlement with Israel and hope to see the occupied territories returned, or it could rearm and face Israel another time. The State Department hoped Hussein could be persuaded to enter direct negotiations with Israel on his own, but the king was for the moment unwilling to risk dissociation from the Palestinians and regional isolation by dealing with Israel alone. The king said the “first thing I must do is to try to convince all the Arab leaders to adopt a moderate solution. Only if this fails could I consider whether it would be feasible to pursue a solution on my own.”⁵⁴⁹ Hussein did not give any reasons for his need to have support from his fellow statesmen, but the increased influence from Palestinians in Jordan must have made him cautious.⁵⁵⁰

Nasser had suffered a humiliating defeat which had drastically reduced his popularity as the leading figure of Arab nationalism.⁵⁵¹ King Hussein’s moderation thrived without the Egyptian challenge. However, the Soviet Union resumed arms deliveries to Egypt and Syria, thus alleviating the domestic frustration against the radical regimes and reigniting the Arab rivalry.⁵⁵² Although Nasser still expressed moderation, Hussein had always been suspicious of his motives, and the king was unwilling to risk isolation if Nasser recuperated from Soviet support and suddenly revoked his acceptance of Jordan-Israel peace talks. The king’s solution was to recruit moderate followers. Time was of the essence, and the US was keenly aware that Israel’s position would become increasingly immobile the longer Hussein waited.⁵⁵³

On July 12, 1967 the State Department declared that the American position now was focused on creating a new peaceful status in the Middle East. In so doing it supported that Israel had

⁵⁴⁶ Telegram 1237 from Consulate Jerusalem to State Department, June 17, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1966–1969: PD, Box 1795, POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/14/67– 6/20/67.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, June 28, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 331.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 264.

⁵⁵¹ Yoram Meital, "The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy after the 1967 War: A Reexamination," *Middle East Journal* 54, no. 1 (2000). 68–69.

⁵⁵² Joint Chiefs of Staff to McNamara, June 29, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 334.

⁵⁵³ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, July 12, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 349.

to withdraw from the occupied territories, but only after establishing a guarantee for the future security of all states.⁵⁵⁴ On the best way to proceed in making peace, Secretary of State Rusk stated,

We are not wedded to any particular words or procedures in order to move toward achievement of a just and durable peace. The essential assurances can be given publicly or privately, through mediators, or through agreements. In the last analysis, a solution cannot be imposed from outside: The basic responsibility for achieving peace lies with the governments and peoples of the area. We, with other members of the United Nations, stand ready to help in any way our friends in the Near East deem helpful.⁵⁵⁵

Rusk's statement declared that the Middle East was not an American problem and that the hands-off approach was still in effect. Israel was in such a strong position and so widely popular on the domestic scene that the US found it best to remain on the sidelines.⁵⁵⁶ On July 13, 1967 King Hussein was reported to be "prepared to conclude some sort of arrangement with the Government of Israel."⁵⁵⁷ Although Rusk wanted to avoid becoming too entangled in the delicate issues involved, he praised Hussein's courage in talking with Israel alone and said this was the "first important breakthrough toward peace" and that it was "an opportunity ... not to be lost, offering as it does a chance to embark on a course in the Arab world which could lead to an acceptance of Israel by its neighbors and to steps which could well change the course of history in the Middle East."⁵⁵⁸

Rusk asked Israel to enter negotiations with an open mind. He had repeatedly tried to alleviate the Arab states' fear of Israeli expansionism, Jordan in particular, and now feared that Israel's interest in the occupied territories would turn him into a "liar."⁵⁵⁹ He wanted to exert greater pressure on Israel and believed that "[t]he more moderate and generous the position of Israel tomorrow, the greater the chance that there can be a good result from Hussein's new readiness."⁵⁶⁰ The CIA cautioned that Rusk's fears might be rightly founded and informed the administration that Israel's willingness to trade away the occupied territory in return for recognition depended on more than simply King Hussein's attitude:

⁵⁵⁴ State Department to Certain Posts, July 12, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 354.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ The US Government received thousands of letters relating to the Middle East crisis. A report on June 8, 1967 stated that 96 percent of the letters were pro-Israel and merely one percent was pro-Arab. The amount of pro-Arab mail was the largest to date. See Read to Rostow, June 8, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPPF, 1966-1969: PD, Box 1793, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/8/67.

⁵⁵⁷ State Department to the Mission to the UN, July 13, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 360.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁹ Rusk, *As I Saw It*. 332.

⁵⁶⁰ State Department to the Mission to the UN, July 13, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 360.

The Israelis may hope that the Arabs (and the Soviets) will draw the “correct” conclusion from the recent war, and that a new order will emerge in the area which will involve acceptance of the Israeli state and assurances for its security. But so far there are few indications that any such new order is emerging, and unless it does, Israel must sooner or later face the problem of how to assure its security.⁵⁶¹

The CIA warned that if the Soviet campaign to recuperate its partners in Egypt and Syria turned out successful, the Arab world would return to its rivalries and moderation would quickly vanish.⁵⁶² The Israeli reply to Rusk’s suggestion for talks with King Hussein was far from the optimism Rusk had hoped for. Foreign Minister Eban did not share Rusk’s enthusiasm for Hussein’s peace-feeler.⁵⁶³ Hussein’s inclination to talk with Israel on his own was welcomed, but Prime Minister Eshkol had doubts about its prospects for success. The two sides were far apart, and Eshkol wanted Hussein to present a more specific framework for the talks.⁵⁶⁴

Intermediary without Influence

In light of Israel’s cold response to Jordan’s peace-feeler, Ambassador Burns wanted to know before advising King Hussein to proceed, if there was real reason to believe that Israel in fact was willing to give concessions on the West Bank.⁵⁶⁵ The reply from the administration was that Israel was too ambivalent. The Israeli position was marred by suspicion of King Hussein, Nasser’s intentions and Israel’s own interests in Jerusalem and the West Bank.⁵⁶⁶

Nonetheless, Hussein reiterated his interest in peace some days later by presenting specific conditions for his talks with Israel. The king wanted a return of the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem to Jordan, and in exchange he could offer minor border adjustments.⁵⁶⁷ Rostow said Israel had “a duty to come to grips with the Hussein offer promptly.”⁵⁶⁸

Israel’s response was non-committal, and Hussein was “deeply disappointed” when Burns reported of Israel’s reservations.⁵⁶⁹ At a meeting in Amman on July 27, 1967 Burns said the US could not guarantee that neither a return of Jerusalem nor the West Bank would emerge from Jordan-Israel talks. Hussein stated his belief that the US would make good on its assurances that forced border alterations would be opposed. In the king’s assessment, Burns’

⁵⁶¹ Memorandum prepared in the CIA, July 13, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 361.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*

⁵⁶³ Mission to the UN to State Department, July 14, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 364.

⁵⁶⁴ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, July 14, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 366.

⁵⁶⁵ Memorandum of Meeting, July 15, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 368.

⁵⁶⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, July 15, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 369.

⁵⁶⁷ Memorandum of Meeting, July 16, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 370.

⁵⁶⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, July 18, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 376.

⁵⁶⁹ Embassy Amman to State Department, July 25, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 390. See footnote 6.

reports signaled diminishing American support for his regime. Moreover, King Hussein suspected that Nasser might try to exploit the opportunity to scapegoat him if he started negotiations and betrayed Arab unity, and he acknowledged that the grueling differences with Israel on the question of Jerusalem could mean risking his domestic position. He hoped that firm American support would enable him to take these risks, but when presented with Burns' reports, Hussein declared that his position was "too weak to undertake bilateral negotiations with the Israelis at this moment."⁵⁷⁰

The first real move toward peace had slipped, and the American focus shifted back to Israel. While Israel was never subjected to substantial pressure, there was increasing frustration in the State Department over Israel's lack of interest in a settlement with Jordan, a settlement which was so much in Israeli and American interest. Rusk asked Israel to demonstrate its declared intention to search for peace rather than territorial gains.⁵⁷¹ However, the chance for a change in Israel's policy was even more illusory than before the outbreak of the war. Whereas the State Department, the Department of Defense *and* the White House had called for a peaceful solution before the outbreak of war, the White House was now highly sensitive to reports that carried evidence of Israel's immense popularity on the domestic scene.⁵⁷² Even if the White House had coordinated with the interests of the State Department, it seems unlikely to have brought about a change in Israel's position. As Rostow informed, at "the present time the criterion of security was overriding in Israeli government discussions—security in the literal short-run sense. From that perspective, holding the West Bank was quite attractive, although, in the long run, it might well be judged less attractive."⁵⁷³ Barbour agreed, and reported that Israel seemed to be more "interested in holding real estate than in solving basic problems."⁵⁷⁴

Israel believed King Hussein had called for an Arab summit meeting in order to gain Arab and international support for a "pro-Jordanian settlement."⁵⁷⁵ The US had come to accept that Hussein was not "free to settle with Israel entirely by himself" and supported the king's

⁵⁷⁰ Embassy Amman to State Department, July 28, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 393.

⁵⁷¹ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, July 29, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 396.

⁵⁷² On June 9, 1967, the figure of pro-Israel mail had risen to 99 percent, whereas only "a handful supported the Arab states" and "a small –almost insignificant– number of letters urged the United States to uphold the territorial integrity of all states." Read to Rostow, June 9, 1967, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, 1966–1969: PD, Box 1794, Folder POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/9/67–6/13/67.

⁵⁷³ Memorandum of Conversation, July 30, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 398.

⁵⁷⁴ Embassy Tel Aviv to State Department, August 7, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 409.

⁵⁷⁵ Memorandum for the Record, August 15, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 418.

attempt to obtain such support from other Arab states.⁵⁷⁶ Moreover, Hussein's moderation was under pressure from the resurfacing Arab rivalry, and while Nasser and the king were still on the same side, the PLO and Syria had taken leadership in the radical camp.⁵⁷⁷ Faced with an increasing population of Palestinians, Hussein was desperate to present negotiations with Israel as a collective Arab decision and not one of his own. Nasser's battered prestige put him in a similar position and together they tried to make a moderate position prevail.⁵⁷⁸ The US hoped the moderate position would triumph at the planned Arab Summit in Khartoum and that a multilateral moderate Arab position could force Israel into a more accommodative position.⁵⁷⁹ Rusk tried to reinforce the moderate Arab states:

[The United States is] hopeful that at the Khartoum meetings the full range of possibilities can be explored in a constructive atmosphere. We are confident a start can be made if a sufficient number of states determine not to be deterred from this purpose. It may be a long time before all the issues which lie at the heart of the Arab-Israel problem can be fully and justly resolved. In the meantime there is no reason for the Arab states to place unnatural obstacles in the path of their own progress and growth.⁵⁸⁰

On September 1, 1967 the Arab Summit in Khartoum declared that the Arab states would not end their belligerence with Israel, there would be no direct negotiations and no peace with Israel.⁵⁸¹ The official US interpretation was that the Khartoum Declaration was in the interest of peace. It did not call for another round of fighting, but it only addressed what the Arab states not were willing to do, there was no mention of how the Arab states could embark on the road to peace.⁵⁸² King Hussein read the declaration to mean no *direct* negotiations and not a formal peace *treaty*, but in King Hussein's view at least, neither negotiations nor an agreement was ruled out.⁵⁸³

However, the three noes from Khartoum were heavily propagated in Israel as a continued state of war between Israel and the Arab states, and it opted for perfect cover to avoid negotiations.⁵⁸⁴ Partly to show the US it was less interested in territory than in peace, Israel secretly kept the door open to negotiations with Jordan. Israel made it clear that a return to the prewar status was out of question but nonetheless expressed interest in a settlement with King

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Meital, "The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy after the 1967 War." 72.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. 76-77.

⁵⁷⁹ State Department to Certain Posts, August 24, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 426.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ The Khartoum Declaration, September 1, 1967, accessed April 8, 2015.

<http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/1FF0BF3DDEB703A785257110007719E7>.

⁵⁸² President Johnson to King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, September 25, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 447.

⁵⁸³ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 268.

⁵⁸⁴ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 258-259.

Hussein.⁵⁸⁵ However, by October 1, 1967 Hussein was the one who stalled. In his view, time was not ripe for peace talks. Hussein's accommodative attitude and desire to reach an agreement with Israel was "ahead of [his] people in appreciating the implications of [his] recent defeat."⁵⁸⁶ Hussein could not disregard the opinion of his large Palestinian population which after the Six-Day War nearly comprised the majority of Jordan's population. The tables had turned again. The US was well aware of the limitations of Israel's willingness to concede control of the West Bank, and of its own inability and unwillingness to change Israel's position. Therefore, the administration did not pressure Hussein to start negotiations that most observers now realized had slim chances of success.⁵⁸⁷

Peace Process Theater

The last remaining hope for Johnson's administration to withdraw from the Middle East without revealing the image of impartiality and concentrate on Vietnam was if the UN adopted a formula both sides could accept. There were several drafts competing for the UN Security Council's adoption, and most only called for a simple withdrawal and made no mention of Arab recognition of Israel. Such resolutions were unacceptable to Israel but widely popular among the Arab states. The Arab states wanted Israeli withdrawal to precede negotiations, but Israel refused to retreat to the prewar boundaries without recognition.⁵⁸⁸ The US was well aware of that fact but equally aware that a resolution that only addressed withdrawal would be discarded by Israel, thus bringing the potential peace process to a premature end. Moreover, the Arab states claimed they were justified in expecting the US to honor its pledge to support the territorial integrity of the Middle East. President Johnson acknowledged that his pledge was still a principle but stated that its implementation was easier said than done. In contrast to the Arab states' expectations, Johnson's administration, according to the President himself, simply did not have a lot of influence on Israel.⁵⁸⁹

While different resolutions were drafted in the UN corridors, King Hussein's moderation was waning. He felt betrayed and unjustly discriminated by what he saw as US double standards. The king claimed that the American position demonstrated unwavering support for Israel. Hussein wanted the West Bank returned to Jordan, and he wanted the US to guarantee that to

⁵⁸⁵ Mission to the UN to State Department, September 26, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 449.

⁵⁸⁶ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 268.

⁵⁸⁷ State Department to Embassy Amman, September 29, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 452. See also footnote 2 and 3.

⁵⁸⁸ Rostow to President Johnson, October 3, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 455.

⁵⁸⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, October 4, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 456.

him. He wanted Johnson to make good on his pledge for Jordan's territorial integrity, but he was still willing to negotiate with Israel to achieve his objective.⁵⁹⁰ Johnson was not willing to make such a guarantee. The US only observed that Hussein's moderation was crumbling in the face of Israel's continued occupation but made no significant effort to change Israel's position.⁵⁹¹

When Palestinians attacked Israeli positions on the occupied West Bank, all hopes of Jordanian-Israeli reconciliation vanished. Rostow informed Johnson that the Israelis "have nothing more to say to Hussein."⁵⁹² The frustrated State Department's patience had run out, and Rusk wanted to enforce a much tougher line on Israel. The arguments in favor of a tough line were compelling: Oil revenues from the Arab states would be secured, and the US could honor its commitment of territorial integrity, keep the Arab world out of Moscow's hands and make the US-Israel relationship a two way street again. The arguments in favor of continuing the US-Israeli relations, troubled as they were, also had significant political appeal: First of all it would be nearly impossible to force Israel to return to the prewar armistice lines, even if they could be negotiated into permanent boundaries. Second, any hard line on Israel would likely destroy Johnson's and the Democratic Party's chances for reelection in 1968, and it would accelerate the opposition's criticism of Johnson's campaign in Vietnam. The State Department and Department of Defense pulled in the same direction. Rusk even supported forcing Israel back to the prewar lines, and McNamara suggested resuming arms deliveries to Jordan, which had been cancelled at the outbreak of war, in spite of Israeli objections.⁵⁹³

The discussion remained a thought experiment, and once more domestic considerations outweighed strategic interests. Such interests were after all still safeguarded, the Soviet Union's prestige in the region had taken a hit with the Arab defeat, and the Arab states continued to export oil to the west. As a result, Johnson continued to keep the Israel pillar disproportionately strong against the wishes of the State Department and Department of Defense. Even Rostow warned that "Israel will take such a hard position that it will kill [the] chances for a settlement", but Johnson did not change the nature of the US-Israel relationship;

⁵⁹⁰ Rostow to President Johnson, October 9, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 462.

⁵⁹¹ Rostow to President Johnson, October 10, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 465; Karp, *Missed Opportunities*. 204.

⁵⁹² Rostow to President Johnson, October 17, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 475.

⁵⁹³ Saunders to Rostow, October 17, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, Document 476.

he accepted Israel's position and never entertained the option to pressure Israel to withdraw.⁵⁹⁴

In a last effort to find a basis for a UN formula that would enable the Johnson administration to retreat from the painful situation without damaging the image of impartiality, Rusk decided to hold Eban to his word that Israel indeed sought a deal with King Hussein. Eban reluctantly agreed.⁵⁹⁵ To secure Hussein's acceptance of the proposed resolution to the UN Security Council, Rusk informed the king that the US in effect was willing to "make a maximum effort to obtain for Jordan the best possible deal in terms of [a] settlement with Israel."⁵⁹⁶ Hussein was more inclined to accept a resolution that only called for Israeli withdrawal, but reassured of American support he stated he would accept the carefully negotiated resolution in the event of its adoption.⁵⁹⁷

When the UN Security Council convened on November 15, 1967, Britain tabled a proposal incorporating the essence of the American draft resolution. Jordanian support and Israel's reluctant approval had been secured before the vote was cast. The UN Security Council Resolution 242 was unanimously passed on November 22, 1967. The resolution called for "withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict," an end of belligerence, and a UN mediator in working for a lasting settlement.⁵⁹⁸ However, the precise language of the resolution was so ambiguous and so vague that Israel could easily dispute it. Still, Resolution 242 was enough to enable the Johnson administration to retreat from the Middle East, and for the coming year it worked only symbolically to pin Israel to concrete interpretations of the resolution.⁵⁹⁹

UN Resolution 242 was the blueprint for negotiations between Israel and the Arab states. The Swedish diplomat Gunnar Jarring was assigned the role as UN mediator. However, Israel had in secrecy declared to the US that it had no interest in a peace treaty with Egypt or Syria. Jordan was the only country Israel might be interested in striking a deal with. Moreover, Jarring's mission had no support in the Israeli government, and Israel used the ambiguity of

⁵⁹⁴ Rostow to President Johnson, October 24, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19 Document 487; Smith, "The United States and the 1967 War." 165, 187, 189–190.

⁵⁹⁵ Mission from the UN to State Department, November 5, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol 19, Document 502.

⁵⁹⁶ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, November 30, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 506.

⁵⁹⁷ State Department to Embassy Tel Aviv, November 30, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 506; State Department to the Mission to the UN, November 5, 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, Vol. 19, Document 508.

⁵⁹⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, November 22, 1967, accessed April 8, 2015.

<http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136>.

⁵⁹⁹ Quandt, *Peace Process*. 47.

Resolution 242 to make sure Jarring remained busy sorting out both Arab and Israeli interpretations of it. The Jarring Mission opted for a cover under which Israel could hide its true intentions, or lack thereof. By signaling willingness to negotiate, Israel prevented the matter from being returned to the UN, where the country would be blamed for the failed peace process. The Jarring Mission was effectively reduced to a mere peace process theater, precisely what Israel had hoped for.⁶⁰⁰

President Johnson's Last Year in the Middle East

Even though President Johnson did nothing to effect negotiations or to make Israel withdraw, his administration tried to make Israel release its grip on the West Bank. When Eshkol arrived in Texas in January 1968 to request thirty F-4 Phantom fighters, Johnson declared he could not support "an Israel that sits tight."⁶⁰¹ Rusk too, was tired of Israel's lack of interest in a settlement and said there would be no more arms sales until Israel clarified its interpretation of Resolution 242 and accepted the necessity of returning the occupied territories in exchange for settlements.⁶⁰²

After it had proven unwilling or unable to offer significant help in securing a return of the West Bank, King Hussein had lost faith in the US. To effect a change in America's perception of Jordan, the king again threatened with turning to the Soviet Union, this time to make Israel rethink the wisdom of holding the West Bank under the threat of a closed circle of Soviet-sponsored regimes.⁶⁰³ The Cold War game succeeded once more. To show the king he had not been completely deserted, the Johnson administration lifted the arms embargo and resumed the delivery of arms that were under contract.⁶⁰⁴

By March 1968, the President's campaign in Vietnam, where the North Vietnamese Tet-offensive had taken its toll in human life and public opinion, had become so unpopular that Johnson declared that he would not run for reelection.⁶⁰⁵

Israel secretly tried to show the US it was serious about seeking peace and in April 1968 the Israeli government authorized Foreign Minister Abba Eban to present King Hussein with a concrete plan for a settlement with Jordan. King Hussein was naturally still interested in

⁶⁰⁰ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 260–261.

⁶⁰¹ Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 579.

⁶⁰² Ibid. 579.

⁶⁰³ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 275.

⁶⁰⁴ Levey, "United States Arms Policy toward Jordan, 1963–68." 542.

⁶⁰⁵ Rusk, *As I Saw It*. 415–423.

having the West Bank returned, and to achieve his objective he was still willing to make territorial and diplomatic concessions. The Israeli proposal for a settlement implied that Israel would cede parts of the West Bank to Jordan. However, Israeli policymakers were unwilling to cede control over Jerusalem, even if Jordanian recognition would result from it. The proposal was in effect an ultimatum. If Hussein did not want to talk along those lines, Israel would continue the occupation. After informal hearings between Hussein and the Israeli government, the two sides met in late September 1968 for the first time in two years. King Hussein, always cautious of public unrest and now forced to take into account the large Palestinian population, rejected Israel's ultimatum. Rather than being scapegoated for having authorized Israel's control over the West Bank, the king preferred to see Israel criticized for its occupation.⁶⁰⁶

In a last attempt to persuade Israel to proceed with Jarring's peace process Johnson on November 7, 1968 authorized the sale of Phantom fighters to Israel.⁶⁰⁷ King Hussein had been eager to start negotiations with Israel but he was acutely aware that he needed support before he could proceed. As a result of the reemerged Arab rivalry, Arab support was scarce, and when Johnson authorized the Phantom deal, King Hussein realized that the US and Israel indeed had developed a special relationship.⁶⁰⁸ Jordan left the Jarring Mission shortly after. Although the Jarring Mission continued under heavy pressure before it eventually collapsed in 1971, the relationship between Israel and Jordan returned to its near-normal character.⁶⁰⁹

The reemergence of the secret channels and the decency of the Jordan-Israel relationship cannot be credited to President Johnson. In terms of leverage on Washington Israel was by 1968 stronger than ever during Johnson's presidency, and Israel was unquestionably the most senior and strongest party in its relationship with Jordan.⁶¹⁰ Nevertheless, the continuation of the American relationships with Jordan and with Israel was a key factor in preserving the relationship between the two. The relationship between Israel and King Hussein suffered several setbacks, but it always recovered. It eventually developed into the Jordan-Israel Peace

⁶⁰⁶ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. 263.

⁶⁰⁷ Hilde Henriksen Waage and Hulda Kjeang Mørk, "Mission Impossible: UN Special Representative Gunnar Jarring and His Quest for Peace in the Middle East" (2015), article under review in *International History Review*, 11.

⁶⁰⁸ Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 579–580; Waage and Mørk, "Mission Impossible" (2015) 8–9; Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948." 242.

⁶⁰⁹ Waage and Mørk, "Mission Impossible" (2015) 24; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 270, 299; Bunch, "Strike at Samu." 74–76.

⁶¹⁰ Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship." 580; Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948." 242–247.

Treaty which was signed in 1994.⁶¹¹ Israel and Jordan spent nearly twenty-five years to reach an agreement, and President Johnson's ineffectiveness in 1967–1968 did little to speed up the process.⁶¹²

⁶¹¹ Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*. 292.

⁶¹² Karp, *Missed Opportunities*. 183.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

King Hussein of Jordan was a master at playing the Cold War game. From his peripheral position, geographically and of significance in US foreign policy, King Hussein became skilled in manipulating the center in Washington D.C.⁶¹³ In search of a strong partner to protect him from his own opposition, the king used the Americans' fear of Soviet influence to persuade the Johnson administration to accept Jordan as a bastion of regional stability in the Middle East. The relationship had been supported and held together by Israel's interest in the king, but when Israel no longer shared this interest, the US-Jordan relationship took on a dynamic of its own. American policymakers came to appreciate that the relationship with King Hussein enabled the United States to preserve US-Arab relations and strategic interests in the Arab world, while at the same time developing a special relationship with Israel.

In spite of King Hussein's many successes in playing one superpower against another, he was unsuccessful in making the Johnson administration reevaluate its perception of the Middle East. Whatever arguments King Hussein presented, the US continued to assess the Middle East from an Israel-centered frame of reference. This adaptation of Israel's point of view had implications for the American understanding of Jordan and King Hussein, but why and how was the US-Jordan relationship affected by the Americans' sympathy for Israel during 1964–1968? Why did the Johnson administration not strengthen Hussein to withstand the Arab nationalism's calls for war in June 1967? And which political concerns influenced the nature of the US-Jordan relationship?

Israel's Part in Shaping Johnson's Understanding of Jordan

Israel had a prominent position in the minds of both American policymakers and the general public. American presidents had long since viewed Israel as a source for domestic support, and the Johnson administration was no different than its predecessors. Moreover, the Johnson administration had only a limited understanding of Arabs and Palestinians. Thus, Israel's views and recommendations were widely accepted as the best course of action, and Johnson willingly lent his ears to advice from pro-Israel friends and advisors. Originally, Jordan's significance in American Middle East policy rested largely on geopolitical concerns. Preventing Soviet influence was one step to ensure stability in the region, but as that stability came under pressure by the Arab realignment in 1964 Jordan became a platform from where Johnson could launch an impression of evenhandedness in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Through

⁶¹³ Gaddis, "On Starting All over Again." 31.

such evenhandedness the US could promote stability and thus ensure its national interests in the Middle East. Jordan, Israel and the US shared a mutual interest in a stable *status quo* in the Middle East, and the Johnson administration had from the very beginning managed to camouflage its sympathy toward Israel under a strategic image of impartiality.

Jordan had always been in a critical position in the Arab world, and without foreign support King Hussein's regime was destined to collapse. It was only when Nasser, the leading figure of Arab nationalism, accepted the king as an equal that Hussein managed to find a middle ground between the increasing popular appeal of Arab nationalism and Jordan's critical dependency on foreign aid. Once the king had found this middle ground, he did everything in his power to retain it. Moreover, Israel had after years of contemplating action against Jordan if King Hussein's regime should collapse, realized that Hussein in fact benefitted Israel's security. The triangular meeting of minds between Israel, Jordan and the US rested on a common interest in regional stability.

American Middle East policy was carefully balanced between the commitment to Israel on the one side, and the strategic necessity of US-Arab relations on the other. The two diverging considerations were bridged by the fact that good relations with the Arab states also kept the tensions in the region to a minimum and thus ensured Israel's security. It gave the Arab states an incentive not to swing too far into Moscow's orbit, which would gravely increase the combined Arab arsenal and the threat to Israel, and it ensured access to the Middle East's economic assets in the Arab states. Moreover, it also allowed Johnson to develop closer ties to Israel, while appreciating that adopting an openly pro-Israel policy would forge a tighter Arab alignment with Moscow. Therefore, the administration preferred to keep a safe minimum distance from Israel. The policy of strategic impartiality had taken shape.

To preserve its national interests in the Arab world the Johnson administration had to disguise that it more often than not aimed to ensure Israel's security. Nevertheless, Israel's preeminence in Johnson's Middle East policy became increasingly evident during the arms sales negotiations with Jordan in 1965 and 1966: If Israel did not accept American arms sales to Jordan the Johnson administration bluntly said it would not accommodate King Hussein's requests. Johnson was seemingly willing to see Jordan being overrun by Soviet influence even though he realized it would unveil the lack of *impartiality* of his administration's Middle East policy. The reason lay in part that, in comparison with Israel, Jordan's mouthpiece to the US was insignificant. Jordan never had the potential to threaten any American interests in the

Middle East. It never had oil it could threaten to withhold from the US, and it could never make a difference on the domestic scene in America.

The only threat Jordan could make, and did make, was turning to the Soviet Union for support. However, the king saw Soviet influence as fuel to the opposition and he only made such threats to highlight the need for close ties with the US. Since Israel had nearly all rights reserved in formulating the Johnson administration's perception of the Middle East, and approved of tying Jordan closer to the US, Israel was essential in shaping, maintaining and strengthening King Hussein's importance in the Johnson's Middle East policy. For as long as Israel's security concerns could be reconciled with American interests in the Arab world, the US tried its best to continue the balanced approach to the Arab-Israeli dispute. Nonetheless, there was always a veil covering the American image of impartiality that Johnson tried to forward. Depending on the events in in the Middle East during Johnson's presidency, this image could be strengthened, but also threatened.

Johnson, Jordan and Israel

The first chance to strengthen the image of impartiality came with King Hussein's arms request shortly after the Cairo Summit in 1964. The close unification of the Arab world hiked the tensions of the Arab-Israeli conflict and compelled Johnson to take a more direct approach to the region's issues. Johnson had little understanding of either Palestinian or Arab nationalism and simply believed that King Hussein was responding to pressure from other Arab states when he requested direct arms sales from the US. And although the king did respond to such pressures, the pressure from the domestic opposition had already proven to be even more threatening. Israel, however, claimed that Hussein's adherence to the Cairo summit signaled his departure from the *de facto* peace, and questioned whether its security would be better served by tying the US closer to Israel, either via direct arms sales or by a security guarantee.

The Johnson administration was already fully aware that accommodating such Israeli requests would thrust the Arab states into Moscow's arms, and it gradually dawned upon the administration that King Hussein not only prevented Soviet influence. The moderation of Hussein's regime also insulated Israel's longest frontier from radical Arab nationalism. As a result, Johnson agreed to consider Jordan's arms request. After all, it would strengthen his image of impartiality. A moderate Jordan became the Johnson administration's best excuse to

maintain the necessary distance from Israel. Essentially, the American image of impartiality in the Arab-Israeli conflict depended largely on King Hussein's regime.

If America turned Jordan's arms request down, the king declared that he would turn to the Soviet Union, if only to protect his newfound position in the Arab world and the domestic popularity he suddenly enjoyed. The moderation of the king's regime was evidently at stake. The Soviet Union was already closely tied to the so-called radical regimes in Syria and Egypt and if Jordan too became radicalized, American policymakers judged that Israel would have a much stronger case for closer alignment, arms sales, and for developing nuclear deterrents. Consequently, strategy-minded advisors in America came to fear that the king would be unable to withstand the Soviet pressure, which would arrive along with Soviet weaponry, and therefore, the Johnson administration in 1965 agreed to supply tanks to Jordan.

The decision to accommodate Jordan's arms request was made because it would strengthen King Hussein's moderation, and a moderate Jordan would ensure low tensions in the Arab-Israeli conflict and thus obviate Israel's need for advanced weaponry. The American image of impartiality had been strengthened, but it was soon challenged. Johnson was tied down in Vietnam, and the troubling situation in Southeast Asia made him desperately responsive to domestic support from the pro-Israel electorate. Domestic concerns were suddenly applied to the American relationship with Jordan. To offset domestic complaints of selling arms to Israel's enemy and to make sure Israel was able to handle its own problems without American help, Johnson authorized arms sales to Israel as well. He argued that such moves were in accord with a balanced approach to the Middle East, and his image of impartiality survived its first challenge.

When the disputes between Israel and Jordan intensified during 1966, the Johnson administration realized that Israeli reprisals were the real threat to the *status quo* Johnson desperately tried to preserve. The downward spiral of infiltrations and retaliations led Johnson to conclude that Israeli unilateralism was the most pressing threat to regional stability. Israeli raids against Jordan destabilized the king's moderate position, and the Johnson administration saw a clear political case for selling aircraft to Jordan when King Hussein in 1966 approached the US for jet fighters. The loss of a moderate regime in the worsening atmosphere of the Arab-Israeli conflict would strengthen Israel's arguments for a formal security guarantee and accelerate its pursuit of a nuclear deterrent. Already by 1966 it was evident that a moderate Jordan was America's key to absolving Israel's needs for advanced weaponry, a security

guarantee and nuclear weapons. However, selling fighters to Jordan would be interpreted in Israel and domestically in America as a departure from Johnson's commitment to Israel's security.

The Art of Balance

Israel accepted the American relationship with King Hussein, but it was far more interested in arms and a security guarantee than in a moderate neighbor. Israel always had the potential to upset Johnson's domestic popularity, and since Johnson's campaign in Vietnam deprived him of domestic popularity, he agreed to sell advanced weaponry to Israel as well. Johnson did not want to strain Israel's patience beyond comfortable bounds and authorized the arms sale without any formal concessions from Israel. In yet another attempt to offset domestic complaints of selling arms to Israel's enemy, and hopefully to remove the nuclear option from Israel's inventory, the Johnson administration sold Israel larger quantities and advanced fighters in the hope that it would preserve the image of impartiality and what the Americans regarded as the *status quo*.

A stable Jordan not under hostile domination was in Washington perceived to be in Israel's best interest. Problems arose as it became evident that Israel did not share that understanding. Completely unchecked by the US, Israeli unilateralism was allowed to develop. It reached its temporary culmination with the attack on Samu in November 1966. Johnson had then pursued a less veiled character of impartiality, and maintained a cautious non-confrontational policy toward Israel for nearly two years. He had twice tried using arms sales to Israel in an effort to force through a change in its handling of Palestinian infiltrations, but not once pressured for Israeli concessions and never entertained using effective measures to make it desist from the disruptive policy. The less veiled impartiality was increasingly evident: As a result of Johnson's non-confrontational approach to Israel, Jordan had never been strengthened to withstand the increasing domestic unrest and foreign pressure that followed in the retaliations' wake. The attack on Samu seriously shook King Hussein, dissociated him from his population and the rest of the Arab world, and led him to question American interest in his regime. The king's moderation was in immediate jeopardy and he appealed for renewed arms sales from America.

The Johnson administration never entertained to accommodate the full extent of King Hussein's arms request after the raid on Samu. After all, two arms sales to Jordan had already resulted in equivalent sales to Israel. Another arms sale to Jordan would in all likelihood

necessitate similar arms sales to Israel, thus demonstrating to the Arab states, and Jordan in particular, that Israel was always at the core of America's Middle East policy. Johnson's image of impartiality would be revealed as not impartial at all. In such an event the Arab states would abandon the US, accept Soviet support and challenge America's national interests in the Middle East. Moreover, constraining Israel and strengthening Jordan could only amount to increased domestic opposition against Johnson.

It was a difficult dilemma, but foremost among the domestic-minded advisors in the administration was President Johnson himself. Against the recommendations of the State Department and pragmatic advisors of the National Security Council, Johnson did not threaten Israel with repercussions. His domestic popularity was already worn thin by the ever-deteriorating campaign in Vietnam, and he did not want to risk facing greater domestic opposition. However, he also wanted to avoid thrusting the Arab states into Moscow's arms. Johnson's relationship with Jordan, the very assurance of King Hussein's moderation and a key element in his commitment to Israel's security, was caught in limbo. It was worth neither strengthening nor sacrificing. The solution was to reinforce King Hussein's moderation with a minimal arms package that did not justify a compensatory sale to Israel. Yet it did not enable the king to remain moderate for long.

Johnson's Retreat from the Middle East

By the beginning of 1967, the internal dynamic of the US-Jordan relationship had come into full fruition. A moderate Jordan prevented Soviet influence, ensured Israel's security, absolved Israel's needs for advanced weaponry, and most importantly by 1967, isolated Israel's requests for tighter alignment with America. However, it never led US policymakers to reassess the significance of their relationship with Jordan. The US made no serious effort to strengthen King Hussein against the mounting pressure from Arab nationalism during the spring of 1967. Instead, it worked with great effort to help Israel find a favorable solution to the May crisis. In constant fear of domestic repercussions Johnson did nothing to sober Israel's reaction to Nasser's closing of the Strait of Tiran, nor did Johnson, when clinging to the sidelines, enable Hussein to detach from the Arab rivalry during its peak intensity late in May 1967.

In early June 1967, when it became evident that the US could not support Israel without revealing that Israel's interests mattered more to the administration than the Arab states', Johnson decided to withdraw from the region's problems, but he only made that decision

when he was reassured that Israel in all likelihood would win a military confrontation. Consequently King Hussein felt forced to go along with foreign and domestic nationalists. In King Hussein's eyes, isolation was far worse, and the US never presented any viable alternatives to it. Hussein may have never been persuaded to stay out of Nasser's inadvertent warmongering during 1967, but the fact that the Johnson administration barely asked him to stay his hand and did nothing to strengthen him against Nasser, demonstrates that Johnson was far more worried of having to come to Israel's aid if tensions exploded. Instead of calming Israel's reaction to the ongoing crisis, Johnson took the view that Israel had to be strong enough to defend its security without American intervention. With domestic sentiment in mind, Johnson's interest in a stable *status quo* and the balanced approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict was replaced with the interest in preventing Israel from dragging the US into a conflict area.

When war came about on June 5, 1967 President Johnson did nothing to prevent Israel from honing in on the West Bank. Johnson allowed Israel to create a status quo wherein Israel's security could be satisfactorily assured, even if no moves toward peace were taken after the war's end. Johnson was urged to pressure Israel to show more interest in peace, but he was highly receptive to Israel's popularity in America. In fear of upsetting the limited support he still had at home, and because of his peculiar belief that the Arab states somehow would be more willing to negotiate with Israel after their humiliating defeat than they had been before the war, Johnson defied advice to ask Israel to return to the prewar lines. After the Six-Day War, Israel viewed King Hussein with indifference, but the American idea that Hussein opted for the necessary distance between Israel and the US had taken deep roots. In fact, after Israel's success in the war, a moderate Jordan was the administration's best excuse to continue keeping Israel at arms' length. Although Israel seemed willing to see the king's replacement, Washington was not.

Instead, Jordan was once more used to ensure Israel's security but this time by forcing an end of fighting in the Middle East. King Hussein's moderation seemed to triumph in the war's aftermath, and in America's eyes Hussein offered interesting opportunities to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict once and for all. Nonetheless, domestic concerns once more trumped geopolitical interest in Jordan. Israel's popularity in America was sky-high after the Six-Day War, and public opinion gave Johnson no more leeway to force Israel to begin negotiations. Moreover, the President had only a limited understanding of Palestinians and Arabs, and he

allowed Israel to sit tight when it proved uninterested in ceding the West Bank in return for a settlement with Jordan. Shortly after, the Johnson administration made its final retreat from the Middle East. Johnson never publically criticized Israel for not entering negotiations with Jordan. He hardly raised his voice over Israel's occupation of the West Bank. He made no substantial efforts to jump-start negotiations, and he made no effort to support King Hussein's moderation as it became pressured when the Arab rivalry resurfaced. President Johnson abandoned the strategic impartiality because trying to continue it would in all likelihood reveal the lack of impartiality in his administration's Middle East policy.

Whereas Israel had supported America's relationship with Jordan in 1964, Israel no longer needed King Hussein to safeguard its security in 1968. Israel preferred advanced American weaponry over moderate neighbors, and its security had been reassured by force in the Six-Day War. In the aftermath of the Six-Day War, the Arab states continued to export oil to the West, and no Arab state which was not already under the Soviet Union's wings was willing to go there, least of all Jordan. The increased number of Palestinians in Jordan had the potential to easily destabilize the king's regime even without Soviet support. Paired with Israel's popularity in America, and Johnson's lack thereof, Johnson settled without explicit agreements of the road to peace when he in November 1968 authorized Israel's purchase of Phantom fighters.

Johnson and Jordan

King Hussein was so worried of the opposition's potential animosity toward him after the war that accepting Soviet support was far from his preferred option. It was, however, the only option he had when it came to manipulating his partner in Washington. However dismayed the king may have been with Johnson's lack of interest in him after the Six-Day War, Jordan was still in desperate need of foreign support. King Hussein was so tired of Israel's preeminence in Johnson's Middle East policy that he once more threatened to turn to the Soviet Union. Although America now found a new status quo in the Middle East, and even though Israel disapproved of continued close ties between the US and Jordan, the US was determined to preserve its national interests in the Arab world. The US had come to realize that, in order to preserve its strategic interests in the Arab world, it had to keep Israel at a safe minimum distance. The United States had to reinvent its strategic impartiality, albeit in a less veiled version. As a result, the Johnson administration listened carefully to King Hussein's complaints and released the arms that were under contract.

Israel's constant interest in nuclear weapons, a security guarantee, advanced weaponry, and its aggressive handling of retaliations had inadvertently nurtured the separate importance of King Hussein in the Johnson administration's thinking. Although Jordan never compared to Israel in American policymakers' minds, or in the minds of the general public in America, Israel had to a very high degree participated in changing the nature of the American relationship with Jordan. Before Johnson's departure from the White House, the US continued to develop the special character of its relationship with Israel, but it also continued to value the relationship with the Jordan, although evidently less than that with Israel. Still, it was enough to allow King Hussein to retain his troubled position. King Hussein resumed the dialogue with Israel, and the two sides eventually reached an understanding that culminated in the Jordan-Israel Peace treaty in 1994.

President Johnson's balanced approach to Jordan and Israel faced constant threats of being unveiled as not balanced at all. The resulting changes that befell Jordan's relationship with the United States during Johnson's presidency kept King Hussein's relationship with Israel alive. Although Johnson's steadfast position at Israel's side in 1964–1968 contributed to the long peace process between Israel and Jordan, his administration facilitated the survival of the processes that eventually led to the 1994 Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty.

Appendix: Maps

Map 1: Jordan 2004 ⁶¹⁴



⁶¹⁴ “Jordan Maps”, *Perry Castañeda Library Map Collection*, courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin, accessed April 7, 2015. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/jordan_pol_2004.jpg

Map 2: Israel 2014⁶¹⁵



⁶¹⁵ "Israel Maps", *Perry Castañeda Library Map Collection*, courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin, accessed April 7, 2015. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia14/israel_sm_2014.gif

Map 3: The West Bank 2014⁶¹⁶



⁶¹⁶ “West Bank and Gaza Maps”, *Perry Castañeda Library Map Collection*, courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin, accessed April 7, 2015. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia14/west_bank_sm_2014.gif

Map 4: Strait of Tiran 1983⁶¹⁷



⁶¹⁷ "Middle East Maps", *Perry Castañeda Library Map Collection*, courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin, Accessed April 7, 2015. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/strait_tiran_83.jpg

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Box 2388, POL 15 JORDAN to POL 17 JORDAN

Box 2389, POL 23 JORDAN to POL JORDAN-UAR

Box 2390, POL JORDAN-US to POL 6 KENYA

Record Group 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969

Box 1793, POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/6/67 to POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/9/67

Box 1794, POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/9/67 to POL 27 ARAB-ISR 6/13/67

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