

managed to kill the appointment. Robert Lovett, among others, when options were severely limited. In the Middle East, Kennedy pursued Eisenhower's impartiality, but he turned its assumptions upside down. Eisenhower and Dulles had distrusted Nasser and regarded Israel as an albatross. Kennedy instead balanced off competing regional and domestic forces by creating new ties to Cairo and embracing the Israelis. Before his administration, Israel had been treated by policymakers as an embarrassment to the United States. Now the president spoke openly of ties to the Jerusalem government and of its close relations to the United States. Kennedy accepted Israel as a positive force consistent with American ideals.¹⁷ For example, in a message to the Zionist Organization of America's annual conference in mid-1962, he stated, "This nation, from the time of President Woodrow Wilson, has established and continued a tradition of friendship with Israel because we are committed to all free societies that seek a path to peace and honor and individual right."¹⁸

The area's temporary quiet facilitated this turnabout in American thinking. Kennedy had demonstrated that Israel could be celebrated—at least rhetorically—for its special connection to the United States without undue negative effects on America's policy in the region.

Decision Making

The decision-making approach of the administration paralleled this effort to create new relations with both Israel and the "nationalist" Arabs. There had been widespread criticism of Eisenhower for being so removed from the details of the policy process that his thinking remained uninformed by the debate within the bureaucracy and among his advisors. His strong dependence on one advisor, Dulles, was also much criticized. Kennedy entered the White House determined to break down Eisenhower's staff system, which he saw as deadening.

In the light of outside recommendations and his own personal style, Kennedy involved a wider variety of advisers than ever before in formulating policy, with the White House becoming more important as an arena of influence and debate. The National Security Council under McGeorge Bundy assumed the prominent role it has played ever since.¹⁹ Kennedy's foreign policy apparatus offered access to an active, dynamic White House staff with pipelines to competing views.

Whereas Eisenhower had personally disliked having groups of Americans competing for influence over U.S. Mideast policy, Kennedy institutionalized the conflict in the White House staff. Robert Komer, an official whom McGeorge Bundy had hired from the CIA to deal with Third World matters, was noted for advocating an opening to Nasser's Egypt. Komer presented to the president the view prevailing at the State Department and the CIA. Available to advise Komer were several experts with experiences from outside the government. These in-

cluded Phillips Talbott, the assistant secretary for Near East and South Asian Affairs whose major experience had been in South Asia, and John Badeau, the ambassador to Cairo, an arabist with many years of experience in Egypt. Komer was also in close touch with officials who conducted relations with the Arab world within the State Department hierarchy.

On the other side of the policy fence, Kennedy asked Myer Feldman, his deputy special counsel, to play the role of conduit for the attitudes of Israelis, Jewish leaders, and congressmen inclined toward the Israeli position. Feldman, a Jew who made no secret of his attachment to Israel, had handled Israeli matters for Kennedy in the Senate where he had served as a legislative aide. His mandate was stronger than that of previous officials who had carried the "Jewish portfolio." Feldman's responsibilities extended to day-to-day operations. For example, in mid-1962 Feldman telephoned Talbott to ask why the State Department regularly sought to dissuade foreign governments from establishing their embassies in Israel in Jerusalem. His phone call did not change policy, but it did lead the department to make a full explanation to McGeorge Bundy.²⁰ In addition to Feldman, other pro-Israeli "insiders" and "outsiders" were available to feed into the White House system. They included Philip Klutznick, the former B'nai B'rith president and then one of Adlai Stevenson's assistants at the United Nations; Abraham Feinberg, prominent Democratic party fund raiser; Abraham Harman, the Israeli ambassador; and a number of pro-Israeli Democratic congressmen.

The arrangement covering Feldman and Komer had an essential asymmetry; except for Israel, Feldman dealt with domestic, not foreign, affairs. Komer, on the other hand, was a high-ranking member of the prestigious National Security Council staff. Feldman's selection suggests Kennedy's keen awareness of the domestic significance of the Israeli question.

It also demonstrates the president's preference for having direct information from individuals with opposing views. Both men often wrote memos presenting their positions and often argued before Kennedy personally, insuring that the president would be exposed to each side's arguments. The president, whose work schedule often included a long stay at his living quarters during the midafternoon and late working hours in the office, liked to conduct minidebates with aides on key issues late in the day. When an issue was being considered at Oval Office gatherings, Feldman and Komer (or, perhaps, Bundy) would argue different, sometimes opposing, sides of an Arab-Israeli question. Thus, this president, more than others, assured his exposure to all arguments at issue in any particular situation.²¹

Many observers have argued that the new president's inspiring new oratory veiled a preference for the old policies and established figures.²² The selection process for secretary of state illustrates this anomaly. Senator J. William Fulbright, long noted for opposing many of Israel's policies, was actually Kennedy's first choice for the post. When the word leaked, civil rights proponents

managed to kill the appointment. Robert Lovett, staunch opponent of the creation of Israel until the last moment in 1948, was then offered the job, but he turned it down because of ill health. When Dean Rusk was considered, Kennedy's staff did not realize he had been a prominent State Department opponent of Israel's establishment in 1948. Given the issue's low salience in this period, Rusk would probably have been chosen even had they known. Few except Israel's staunchest supporters and the officers of the Near East Bureau even wondered about Rusk's Middle East position. Rusk was also a protege of John Foster Dulles, suggesting a continuity at Foggy Bottom that applied to the Middle East as well.²³ When policy did change, the differences were often subtle and the locus for change was at the White House rather than the State Department.

Policy toward the Arab World

The new approach to Nasser can be illustrated by a statement by Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles in fall 1961:

Only a few years ago all thoughtful observers were clearly concerned about Soviet penetration into the Middle East. Many thought that Egypt, for example, was on the road to Soviet control. Yet today Nasser's nationalism fiercely combats internal communism and his relations with the U.S.S.R. grow increasingly cool. Although the situation in the Middle East remains unstable and unpredictable, the Soviet gains here run far behind their expectations.²⁴

In attempting to arrange a new relationship with Nasser, Kennedy relied on a person-to-person, presidential gambit of direct correspondence. Instead of the dry State Department letters—"documents that sounded like treaties"—Kennedy had letters written in his own personal style. Several Arab leaders received them, but the central target was Nasser.²⁵ Dissatisfied once with an aide-mémoire that Badeau was to carry back to Cairo, the president called in a secretary and personally dictated it. Generally, the letters were "correct and polite, but very frank indeed"; yet, they created a "feeling" of dealing between equals. There still were no private arrangements or understandings. As Kennedy admitted at a mid-1962 news conference, "We continue to attempt to have good relations with the U.A.R., but I have received no information or assurances from President Nasser in regard to any future policy decisions which he might make."²⁶

Future events were rapidly to confirm this description. In September 1962 Nasser released Kennedy's first letter and his own reply, an act that infuriated the president and began his disillusionment with his Egyptian counter-

part.²⁷ Kennedy had cause to be embarrassed. Assuring Nasser that "our attitude continues to be based on sincere friendship," he stated as well, "I am also proud of the real encouragement which my government and the American people have in the past given to your aspirations and those of your countrymen, especially in the critical days of 1956."²⁸ These were not sentiments the pro-Israeli forces were likely to appreciate.

The substantive side of this "fresh effort" toward Egypt was increased aid, especially PL-480 wheat, which Kennedy sought in the face of a Congress progressively disillusioned with Nasser.²⁹ There were other signs of the intent to demonstrate "evenhandedness." For example, in April 1962 the United Nations Security Council condemned Israel (with the United States voting in favor) because of an Israeli retaliatory raid against Syria. Publicly, the president maintained a hands-off posture; privately, the president approved, according to Feldman, because he felt he could not reverse Rusk, Bundy, Stevenson, and others who were all in favor of a U.S. vote for condemnation.³⁰ Whenever United Nations votes arose on Arab-Israeli issues, the positive impartiality pursued by the administration was challenged. To vote against an Israeli position was to court the antagonism of Israel and its supporters; to vote against Arab objectives was to endanger the policy of new relations with the Arab world.

But Arab-Israeli tensions were not what led to the breakdown of the new Arab strategy. As with the early Eisenhower efforts, conflicts among Arab countries were the cause. For example, when Syria withdrew from the union with Egypt, the problem arose whether to alienate Nasser by recognizing the new regime in Syria or to alienate Damascus by failing to do so. In the end the United States waited until the Soviets had themselves extended recognition.³¹

The Arab conflict that broke the back of Kennedy's approach to Nasser occurred in little known, backward Yemen, still living under a theocratic medieval regime barely affected by the modern world. In September 1962 the autocratic ruler of the country died; a few days later pro-Nasser army officers staged a coup, ending ten centuries of the imamate. The revolt, however, was only partially successful, for the imam's son rallied his forces and retreated to the hinterland along the border with Saudi Arabia. A classic interventionist struggle evolved with the new regime in Sana, Yemen's capital, appealing to Nasser, while the royalist forces sought aid from Saudi Arabia and Jordan—two countries concerned that the defeat of yet another monarchy would threaten their regimes. Gradually, Nasser's "Vietnam" emerged. At first Russian-made planes flew in arms and military advisers. By mid-October, regular Egyptian troops were entering the country.

In Washington these events set off a policy debate lasting through the fall on whether or not to recognize the new regime. Many American diplomats at home and abroad favored recognition on the grounds that the new regime was bound to be better than its anachronistic predecessor. Here was one opportunity

for the United States to side with an Arab regime committed to political progress.³²

In the Near East Bureau under Phillips Talbott, some officials hoped that recognition would limit Nasser's involvement; others argued more bluntly that recognizing Yemen would give the United States more clout with Nasser and would make him more amenable. This argument was strengthened when Nasser seemed to promise Ambassador Badeau that Yemen would not be used as a base for attacks on neighboring Saudi Arabia and the British possession of Aden. Since intelligence reports predicted defeat for the Yemeni royalists, it was also hoped by some supporters of U.S. recognition that such a step would prevent the U.A.R. and the new regime in Yemen from involving the Soviet Union.³³ The key people backing recognition were Rusk and Komer.

A curious coalition opposed recognition, although their position was not coordinated. Major Pentagon officials and the British were opposed on the grounds that it would weaken the British position in Aden. Oil representatives and diplomats in Jiddah were opposed because they feared that the new Yemeni regime would threaten Saudi Arabia. Feldman and his allies were unenthusiastic and cautious; they came up with the idea that if recognition occurred, a quid pro quo should be demanded from Nasser, such as reducing anti-Israeli propaganda, but they did not make this recommendation in time for it to be acted upon. The decision to recognize came in mid-December. Afterward, pro-Israeli congressmen and groups were generally critical of the decision.

The arguments in favor seemed more powerful to the president because the republicans appeared to be gaining and the royalist opposition on Saudi soil to be waning. The argument that prevailed in Washington was that it would be preferable to accept a *fait accompli* and gain points for the new Arab strategy in the bargain. Before recognition was extended, the Sana regime responded to American inquiries by announcing that it would reaffirm Yemen's international obligations and would undertake to live at peace with its neighbors.³⁴

Had the Yemen War ended soon afterward, with the anticipated victory of the republicans, the intended effect of recognition would have been achieved. Instead, the war dragged on and destroyed the new Kennedy approach to the Arab world, turning his policy into one like the old Eisenhower-Dulles defense of conservatives. It was one thing to flirt with Nasser as long as he remained at home and relied on propaganda to promote Arab unity. But Nasser was escalating his involvement in the Yemen, and the Saudis—who were supposedly aligned with the United States—felt threatened by his moves and were countering with support for the royalists. Several American diplomats and oilmen began to fear that the future of the Saudi regime was in jeopardy. Despite recognizing the Yemeni republicans opposed by the Saudis, the administration feared supporting Nasser against Jiddah lest Western oil interests and a major pro-American regime suffer.³⁵ Resolving this apparent contradiction in American policy

meant ending the Yemen conflict as soon as possible by gaining a disengagement of all external forces.

In Jiddah and Cairo, the American ambassadors sought to persuade Nasser and Crown Prince Faisal (now in charge; he would become king in November 1964) to disengage. In Cairo, Badeau sought to convince Nasser that his long-term interests involved good relations with the United States, and these were being threatened by his Yemeni expedition. In Jiddah, Ambassador Parker T. Hart assured Faisal that the United States was behind his regime despite its recognition of the Yemeni republican government. Hart also encouraged him to cease his backing of the royalists. In early 1963 the administration encouraged mediators to arrange a settlement. It was hoped an effective U.N. emissary could be arranged, but with the situation further deteriorating, Ellsworth Bunker was appointed as a special presidential envoy.³⁶

The ensuing strategy failed. Several State Department and White House officials had concluded that Nasser was too committed to the Yemeni republicans to withdraw precipitously and would if necessary extend the war into Saudi Arabia.³⁷ Moreover, if the war continued, some in Washington feared that both the U.A.R. and the new Yemen regime would invite Soviet military assistance. The way to attain U.A.R. withdrawal was to have the Saudis withdraw first. To encourage the Saudis along this path, Bunker would publicly reassure Faisal of American support and offer eight U.S. Air Force planes to help protect Saudi Arabia from the U.A.R. aircraft that were frequently raiding Saudi villages suspected of serving as royalist havens. The Pentagon, especially the Air Force, was opposed to this plan from the outset because the Dhafan base in Saudi Arabia had been deactivated the previous year.³⁸

There were other problems with this strategy. If the eight planes sent to Saudi Arabia represented a serious gesture, the Saudis might treat them as a factor in the war, thereby risking escalation and further American military involvement. If, on the other hand, the planes were intended as symbols, they might have a negligible effect on Saudi diplomacy. The strategy also depended on Nasser's placing at least as high a value on relations with the United States as the Kennedy administration placed on him. Shortly, the Kennedy team would discover that their influence was limited in both Arab capitals.

Once Bunker had presented the planes to Faisal and returned to Washington, it was clear that Secretary General U Thant was reluctant to continue a mediation likely to fail. Therefore, Bunker was sent back to the area to try for an agreement between Nasser and Faisal. After engaging in shuttle diplomacy between the two capitals, Bunker produced an agreement for disengagement, but it broke down—in part because the deal was rooted in an American initiative and did not fulfill the political aims of both parties, and in part because the United States preferred U.N. observers rather than its own personnel to supervise the withdrawal.³⁹ By the time the U.N. observer team began to arrive in the

Yemen, nearly three months had passed since the agreement had been signed and it was already disintegrating.

The war in Yemen dragged on. There were other agreements between Nasser and Faisal—in August 1965 and August 1967.⁴⁰ Neither was more successful than the first, but the Six-Day War so severely weakened Egyptian forces that they never again attained a similar strength and their evacuation was completed by December 1967. Subsequent Yemeni republican governments turned out to be more moderate than other nationalist regimes in the area. In the long term the United States had limited the Yemeni conflict without a threat to Saudi Arabia, but in the meantime American efforts to establish a new relationship with Nasser were ruined. When Lyndon Johnson became president in late 1963, the atmosphere had been poisoned. In Washington, Nasser's reputation had plummeted. The Yemen War had forced the United States into the old role of protecting conservative Arab regimes against the more progressive, a role that the Kennedy administration had determined to avoid. The president grew more skeptical of Nasser's motives before his fateful trip to Dallas. Although some officials continued to explain Nasser's actions as motivated by domestic Egyptian politics, others became disillusioned as well. Those who had argued that Nasser was "the wave of the future" found it much harder to gain adherents.⁴¹

Symbolically, JFK had planned to invite both the Israeli prime minister and the Egyptian president to the White House in 1964. King Saud had visited Kennedy in early 1962 and Crown Prince Faisal had followed later in the year. Neither set of talks was successful. Meanwhile, plans for the Israeli visit went forward and Levi Eshkol arrived in June 1964; the invitation to Nasser was never delivered. Badeau later ruminated ruefully, "I am sure that Nasser didn't understand what made America tick . . . I felt that it would do a great deal to make our relations more understanding if he would just come to this country and see it and talk with businessmen and so forth. So I worked very hard toward that end and I would have gotten it had not the Yemen war broken out and that put the end to it."⁴²

By the time that Kennedy died, his initial policy lay in shambles, the fear of falling Arab dominoes having surmounted the hope of a new relationship with a progressive nationalist. A few bureaucratic pockets still cherished the Egypt-first strategy, but as a national policy, it was moribund and would not revive fully until 1973. By spring 1963, the administration was concerned about the internal turmoil in Jordan, believed to be inspired by Nasserist sympathizers.⁴³ As in the Eisenhower era, intra-Arab tensions had undermined an American administration's plans for a new foothold in the Arab world. The Kennedy experience is all the more representative because it occurred when the Arab-Israeli dispute was relatively quiescent.

When the Yemeni crisis destroyed the approach to Nasser, no new pol-

icies were waiting to replace it. Kennedy's assassination removed a leader who might have developed alternatives; his successor was uninterested.

Policy toward Israel

A major breakthrough in Middle East policy under Kennedy was the concept of improving relations with the Israelis even while flirting with Israel's major adversary of the time, Nasser of Egypt. Administration personnel repeatedly argued that there was no contradiction here. In describing a luncheon meeting he had held with an Israeli official in early 1963, Komer reported:

I further queried the generally critical Israeli attitude about our Nasser and Yemen policies, both of which I saw as quite in Israel's interest. It was Soviet arms, not U.S. wheat or development credits, which enhanced the threat to Israel; nor was this arms flow indirectly dependent on U.S. aid. On the other hand, to the extent that Nasser felt a vested interest in good relations with us, he would obviously be on good behavior toward Israel lest he jeopardize this interest. I further argued that since we and the Israelis had a joint interest in the preservation of Pro-Western regimes in Jordan and (paradoxically) even in Saudi Arabia, our Yemen disengagement policy made real sense from the Israeli point of view.⁴⁴

The president presented this new philosophy to Foreign Minister Golda Meir at a late December 1962 meeting in Ralm Beach. There the policy of combining close ties with Israel with initiatives toward the Arab world was stipulated more clearly than on any public occasion during the Kennedy era. According to the minutes of the meeting,

The United States, the President said, has a special relationship with Israel in the Middle East really comparable only to that which it has with Britain over a wide range of world affairs. But for us to play properly the role we are called upon to play, we cannot afford the luxury of identifying Israel—or Pakistan, or certain other countries—as our exclusive friends, hewing to the line of close and intimate allies (for we feel that about Israel though it is not a formal ally) and letting other countries go. If we pulled out of the Arab Middle East and maintained our ties only with Israel this would not be in Israel's interest.

To be effective in our own interest and to help Israel, the President continued, we have to maintain our position in the Middle East generally. Our interest is best served if there is a group of sovereign countries associated with the West. We are in a position then to make clear to the Arabs that we will maintain our friendship with Israel and our security guarantees.⁴⁵

The Kennedy administration reassured the skeptical Israelis that the United States could support them with the Sixth Fleet in the event of local instabilities.⁴⁶ In the meeting with Meir, the president stated, "I think it is quite clear that in case of an invasion the United States would come to the support of Israel. We have that capacity and it is growing."⁴⁷

Kennedy's administration supported these cordial remarks with substantive policies. During this period the Israelis had two major requests of the United States: for the sale of Hawk missiles and for a satisfactory allocation of Jordan waters, an issue left over from the termination of the Johnston mission in the mid-1950s. Kennedy backed Israel's contention that it could unilaterally implement its part of the Johnston plan despite persistent Arab opposition.⁴⁸ But the Hawk missile deal represented the most important policy innovation of the period. For the first time, the United States agreed to an arms deal with the Jewish state. This new relationship with Israel had major long-term implications for American policy toward the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Israeli concern over Russian arms shipped to Egypt and Iraq had led it to ask for the anti-aircraft Hawk missile late in the Eisenhower era. When Kennedy saw Ben Gurion at the Waldorf Astoria in May 1961, the Israelis renewed the request, but Israel was given the standard answer compiled by the State Department with the aid of the Pentagon.⁴⁹ The United States would not become engaged in the Arab-Israeli arms race. But the Israelis and their supporters persisted. Feldman responded with a memo for the president in which he pointed to a basic contradiction in American policy—the administration was committed to a balance of arms in the Middle East, but it was not prepared to redress the imbalance caused by Russian aid to the Arabs.⁵⁰

After debates at the White House between Komer and Feldman, the president had the two investigate whether any other allied weapon system could counter the Russian arms effectively. The British wanted to sell Israel their own anti-aircraft missile, the Bloodhound, and were opposed to American competition. The White House concluded between mid-1961 and mid-1962 that no alternative to the Hawk would satisfy Israel's legitimate security needs.⁵¹

Kennedy knew the implications of this conclusion. Although the Hawk was still classed as a defensive weapon, its sale could begin a new American activity in the area and could well hinder Kennedy's dialogue with Nasser on Arab nationalism. Yet the critical problem remained that neither the Russians nor the Egyptians were interested in an arms limitation agreement. The Israelis could not acquire weapons elsewhere to effectively counter the Russian arms. When Ambassador at Large Chester Bowles met with Nasser in Cairo in February 1962, the Egyptian leader rejected the idea of a private understanding with Israel on limiting the size of each side's military forces.⁵² Defense Department evaluations confirmed that the Middle East balance of power might soon favor

the Arabs. There were persistent reports in this period, for example, that German scientists were aiding the Egyptians with the development of missiles.⁵³

In June 1962, Assistant Secretary Talbott reluctantly informed the American ambassadors to the Middle East of the impending sale. If the Israelis were indeed falling behind in the arms race, what option was there? Even the dubious ambassadors to the Arab countries had no effective counterargument. As one of the participants later recalled,

We had a long debate at this meeting as to whether this sale should be made, of the Hawks. The eventual conclusion of the meeting was a reluctant agreement that it was all right, it should be done. The Ambassadors to most of the Arab countries were very dubious, very nervous about it, but on the basis that it was a strictly defensive weapon and that the Israelis in fact appeared to be falling behind at the time in the arms balance and needed some support, that this was probably the least offensive type of arms that we could furnish—the least offensive to the Arabs—that we should go ahead with the proposed sale of Hawks.⁵⁴

This decision, which would basically alter the American-Israeli relationship, was made then not because of domestic politics but because of the policy commitment to a regional balance of power, which the administration believed in jeopardy because of Russian arms shipments to Iraq and Egypt.⁵⁵ The White House decision-making structure, which gave the pro-Israeli spokesman a voice in the process itself, did allow key arguments to be made that led to a successful conclusion of the arms deal. In the Eisenhower administration it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, for pro-Israeli forces to have initiated such a process.

While domestic politics did not influence the basic decision, they did influence its announcement. Since the congressional elections of 1962 were soon to occur, Kennedy was encouraged to set a deadline for the decision. Once he decided to sell the Hawks, he sought to receive credit in the domestic political arena. The White House leaked the information to several Jewish leaders and some of the congressmen most active in lobbying for the sale. An article soon appeared in the *New York Times* announcing the deal.⁵⁶

The department immediately sent a telegram to relevant embassies indicating that the possible sale was "not a change or reversal of long-standing U.S. policy. The U.S. intends to continue to avoid becoming a major supplier of offensive or sophisticated weapons to parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is [a] single decision designed [to] meet [a] specific need for an improved air defense." U.S. ambassadors in most Arab capitals were told they could reply affirmatively if they were asked whether the Hawk would also be sold to the Arabs.⁵⁷ In keeping with the administration's effort to keep Egyptian support, a high-ranking official in the Near East Bureau had already informed Nasser personally. As a

consequence his press was surprisingly quiet when the word became public.⁵⁸ Several weeks later, Badeau reported that the U.S. government had "come off as well as could be hoped on this one."⁵⁹ Other American ambassadors were more apprehensive. The American embassy in then conservative Libya reported that the sale "could serve as [a] catalyst to bring together vocal Libyan Arab nationalists in [an] anti-U.S. and/or anti-U.K. attack." Protests from disparate Arab regimes such as Jordan, Syria, and Iraq were also reported.⁶⁰

Still the president maintained the pretense of no military aid to Jerusalem. In April of the next year, questioned about military assistance to Israel, he stated, "As you know, the United States has never been a supplier of military equipment directly to the Israelis. We have given them economic assistance."⁶¹ In the strictest sense, the statement was accurate, but as all the principal actors well knew, the Hawks for Israel had already been ordered. Indeed, the Hawk issue had prompted a first-ever U.S.-Israeli meeting in July 1962 to review the regional arms balance, a process later continued in fall 1963 when the Israelis requested several new weapons.⁶²

The Kennedy system also promoted economic assistance to Jerusalem. When the Israelis sought to finance the Hawk deal by a long-term low-interest loan, the Pentagon demurred because it preferred rapid payments and a State Department paper likewise argued that the Israelis could afford to pay immediately. But Feldman discovered that the Australians had made special arrangements with Washington for financing weaponry. Marshalling his arguments that Israel could not afford strict terms and it deserved a better deal because it did not receive military grant aid, Feldman used the Australian arrangement as a model and persuaded the president to overrule the Pentagon. This decision was significant because it set a precedent for later weapons arrangements.⁶³ Similarly, when various nonmilitary types of foreign assistance for Israel were discussed, AID and the State Department were invariably arrayed against the pro-Israeli camp (congressmen, Jewish leaders, the Israeli ambassador, Feldman). In the end, the president usually overruled the aid bureaucracies and substantially increased the sums for Israel.⁶⁴

There was another face to the administration's Israel policy, however; in return for the largesse extended, it sought Israeli cooperation with American objectives and problems. Kennedy was cordial but explicit in his meeting with Meir. His argument was essentially that the United States and Israel were engaged in a partnership, with responsibility on both sides:

In the Middle East we have the twin problems of being historically and obviously associated with Israel and, especially in this Administration, building on that association through our actions with respect to the Jordan waters, Hawks, and aid, while at the same time we have other responsibilities in the Middle East. Israel, the United States and the free world all

have difficult survival problems. We would like Israeli recognition that this partnership which we have with it produces strains for the United States in the Middle East.⁶⁵

The new policy of an extended hand toward Jerusalem, therefore, anticipated a quid pro quo: Kennedy was forthright in his mixture of friendship and expectation: "This country is really interested in Israel, the President said, as he is personally. We are interested that Israel should keep up its sensitive, tremendous, historic task. What we want from Israel arises because our relationship is a two-way street. Israel's security in the long run depends in part on what it does with the Arabs, but also on us."⁶⁶

Despite his stress on Israeli responsibilities and American expectations, the concentration on partnership and informal alliance with Jerusalem represented a milestone in American thinking toward the Israelis. Certainly, neither Truman—with his low security interest in Israel—nor Eisenhower—with his view of Israel as a hindrance to American interests—could conceivably have made the statements presented by Kennedy in his Palm Beach meeting with Meir. Even though they were made privately, Kennedy knew that they would soon leak. Ten months later he reaffirmed his commitments to Meir in a letter to the Israeli prime minister.⁶⁷ Just as the administration had appealed to the Arab nationalists, its policies toward Israel were leading toward an era of cooperation between Jerusalem and Washington.

The Johnson Plan

As Meir and Kennedy acknowledged to each other, delicate diplomatic differences still existed between the two governments—especially on how to settle the Arab-Israeli dispute. According to the president, "a settlement might seem impossible to achieve, but it is equally impossible to let this dispute run on and blow up."⁶⁸ Their specific differences included the questions of how to deal with the U.N. and how to deal with the refugees, both of which came to a head in the extended discussions in 1961 and 1962 over the Johnson Plan.

Most new presidents seek some step toward facilitating an Arab-Israeli peace. Given the quiet of the period, Kennedy was content to provide opportunities for bridgebuilding between Arabs and Israelis (in matters such as water projects, desalinization, mixed armistice commissions, refugee problems, none of which succeeded although they were not vigorously pursued). The president had been particularly concerned with the Arab refugees. As early as February 1957, in addressing a meeting of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Kennedy had said:

Let those refugees be repatriated to Israel at the earliest practical date who are sincerely willing to live at peace with their neighbors, to accept the Israeli Government with an attitude of *civitas filia*. Those who would prefer to remain in Arab jurisdiction should be resettled in areas under control of governments willing to help their Arab brothers, if assisted and enabled to earn their own living, make permanent homes, and live in peace and dignity. The refugee camps should be closed.⁶⁹

In an interview with an Israeli newspaper in summer 1960, "Kennedy stressed the importance of the refugee issue."⁷⁰ In repeated private discussions with Dean Francis Sayre of the Washington Cathedral and Feldman shortly after the inauguration, he took a personal interest in the problem.⁷¹ After White House consultations, an exploratory mission through the United Nations was chosen to mask the American initiative in case of failure. The long dormant Conciliation Commission for Palestine was chosen. Although it required cooperation with the other two members, France and Turkey, using the commission permitted the American special representative to serve as a United Nations official. Joseph Johnson, president of the Carnegie Endowment, was selected after discussions among White House aides; he was asked to produce resolutions on the refugee issue that might be considered at the United Nations with the support of all involved parties.⁷² In planning for the enterprise the president, Feldman, Bundy, Komer, Rusk, Talbott, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (White House liaison with Adlai Stevenson), Stevenson, and U.N. Secretary General Hammarskjöld all seem to have been involved.

In September 1961, Johnson embarked on a fact-finding mission to the area. With several Arab leaders, discussions were "realistic and quiet" in tone, but they were "relatively vague."⁷³ When he reached Israel, however, Johnson found that Ben Curion and other Israeli leaders feared that the mission would give the refugees a free choice to return to Israel where they would serve as a fifth column against the Jewish state. Returning to New York, the U.N. special representative prepared a report and invited the comments of the major involved parties. The Israelis did not provide suggestions for revising the draft, but the Arabs did. To the consternation of Foreign Minister Golda Meir, some of these were accepted in the final report by Johnson.⁷⁴

By now, Meir and Johnson were developing what was by all accounts a mutual antipathy.⁷⁵ In his first report, Johnson suggested in a general way that the refugee question could be handled step-by-step as an issue isolated from the rest of the Arab-Israeli dispute. Even this tentative recommendation was attacked by Arab delegations, who stressed that the only solution for the refugee question was the right of unqualified repatriation.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Johnson's mission was renewed by the appropriate organs of the U.N. in early 1962.

