

The Ties that Bind:
The Causes and Ramifications of the 1962 Sale of Hawk Anti-Aircraft Missiles to Israel

by

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Abstract

In August of 1962, American President John Fitzgerald Kennedy made the decision to sell Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel, ending the U.S. arms embargo. Kennedy's decision was motivated by three key factors. First and foremost, Kennedy chose to sell Hawk missiles to Israel in exchange for Israeli concessions regarding the Negev Nuclear Research Center at Dimona. Second, the missiles were provided to the Jewish State as compensation for Kennedy's relationship with Egyptian president Nasser, including the agreement to provide Egypt with PL-480 aid. Finally, the United States chose to sell Hawks to Israel in an attempt to resettle Palestinian refugees in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. In addition to ending the long-standing arms embargo to Israel, the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles also had considerable ramifications, including opening the floodgates for further arms sales to Israel and contributing significantly to the arms spiral in the wider Middle East. Ultimately, JFK's decision to end the arms embargo to Israel in 1962 not only contributed to the Near East arms spiral, but also laid the foundation for the American-Israeli relationship that continues to this day.

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Introduction

Nestled in the Aminadav Forest, in the Mateh Yehuda region near Jerusalem, lies the Yad Kennedy memorial. Housing an eternal flame, the memorial mimics the stump of a tree and symbolizes a life cut short. Yad Kennedy is dedicated to President John F. Kennedy who was assassinated in 1963 in Dallas, Texas. The memorial, which was partially financed by funds raised by the American Jewish community, pays tribute to the friendship between Israel and the United States.¹ Further still, Yad Kennedy is symbolic of the U.S.-Israeli special relationship. Visitors to the region may be surprised to stumble upon Yad Kennedy. After all, a memorial dedicated to the young American president seems peculiar in the foothills of Jerusalem. Upon closer inspection, however, Kennedy's role in cementing the U.S.-Israeli relationship becomes apparent.

This undergraduate honours thesis examines President John F. Kennedy's foreign policy towards the State of Israel. Despite Kennedy's short time in office, the United States made a significant shift in foreign policy towards Israel and the Arab world: the Kennedy administration broke the U.S. arms embargo and sold Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) in 1962. In doing so, JFK was the first American president to make a formal commitment to Israeli security. This paper answers the question of why the United States chose to sell Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel in 1962 and it also pinpoints the factors that led to this decision. Considering that this shift had significant, long-reaching and long lasting implications for the Middle East, this thesis will also determine the ramifications of how the Hawk sale impacted future weapons sales to the Near East. Ultimately, the American decision to sell Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel both opened the floodgates for further American arms sales to Israel

¹ Go Jerusalem, "Kennedy Memorial," *Go Jerusalem*, <http://www.gojerusalem.com/items/213/Kennedy-Memorial/> (accessed August 19, 2014).

and contributed heavily to the Middle East arms spiral in the mid to late 1960's.

In light of the close relationship between the United States and Israel, the sale of the Hawk anti-aircraft missile has recently received attention of scholars in many countries. To begin, author Douglas Little, Professor of History at Clark University in the United States, addressed the topic in his 1993 publication *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-1968*. According to Little, Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy were central in solidifying the U.S.-Israeli alliance. Furthermore, Little argues that the United States provided the Hawk to Israel in an attempt to halt Israel's desire to pursue the development of nuclear weapons. Author Warren Bass challenges these views in his 2003 book titled *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance*. In the fifth chapter of the publication, titled *Israel's Missile Gap: How America Began Arming the Jewish State*, Bass argues that the principle factor that motivated the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles was Israeli insistence and persistence. Unlike author Douglas Little, Bass thus contends that the Hawk missiles were not provided in an attempt to halt the Israeli nuclear program.

David Tal and Avraham Ben-Zvi similarly adopt varying views in their publications. In his 2014 article titled "Symbol Not Substance? Israel's Campaign to Acquire Hawk Missiles, 1960-1962", Professor David Tal, Director of the Israel Studies Program at the University of Calgary, argues that the United States did not offer the Hawk missiles to Israel in exchange for concessions. Instead, Tal contends that the sale "followed from decisions taken by the Eisenhower administration combined with Israeli lobbying and geopolitical changes in the Middle East".² As such, the foundation for the U.S. Israeli relationship was laid under Eisenhower. Tal also focuses on how Soviet weapons sales to the Arab States created the

² David Tal, "Symbol Not Substance? Israel's Campaign to Acquire Hawk Missiles, 1960-1962," *The International History Review* 22, no. 2 (2000): 204, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40108369>.

necessary circumstances whereby the Kennedy Administration could justify supplying weapons sales to Israel.

Professor Avraham Ben-Zvi, lecturer in the department of International Relations at the University of Haifa, has also written extensively on the sale of the Hawk anti aircraft missile and the relationship between the United States and Israel. His articles include “Influence and Arms: John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and the Politics of Arms Sales to Israel” and “Stumbling into an Alliance: John F. Kennedy and Israel”. In addition to his articles, Professor Ben-Zvi has also published a number of books pertaining to the sale of Hawk missiles. His publications include *Decade of Transition: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Origins of the American-Israeli Alliance, 1953-1962*, *John F. Kennedy and the Politics of Arms Sales to Israel* and *In the Shadow of the Hawk: Lyndon B. Johnson and the Politics of Arms Sales to Israel*. In his works, Ben-Zvi notes that the 1967 Six Day War has, by virtue of its magnitude and global impact, come to be viewed by scholars as the foundation of the relationship between Washington and Jerusalem. In contrast to David Tal, however, Ben-Zvi argues in his publications that the seeds of the American-Israeli alliance were planted under the Kennedy Administration, whereby the relationship can be considered a “by-product of the strategic changes whose origins lay outside the intrinsic parameters of the American–Israeli framework”.³

In addition to the above-mentioned scholars, it is important to note that the case of the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles has been noted in a number of other publications pertaining to American-Israeli relations. In these cases, however, the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles is highlighted in the wider context of U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East and is not the focus of the work. While there has thus been considerable scholarship pertaining to the sale of

³ Abraham Ben-Zvi, “Stumbling into an Alliance: John F. Kennedy and Israel,” *Israel Affairs* 15 (2009): 226, accessed October 18, 2014, DOI: 10.1080/13537120902982959.

Hawk missiles, these aforementioned works focus on the sale of the Hawk missile and do not extend to address the ramifications of the sale. This undergraduate honours thesis looks beyond the sale and places the transaction in the larger context by addressing the international implications of the Hawk sale on the arms spiral in both Israel and the wider Near East, namely in Nasser's Egypt. As such, this undergraduate honours makes a worthwhile contribution to the existing literature pertaining to U.S. foreign policy towards the state of Israel.

This thesis makes use of the historical documents of the *Office of the Historian*, made available by the U.S. Department of State, and relies heavily on Volume XVII (Near East, 1961-1962) and Volume XVIII (Near East, 1962-1963) of the *Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1963* (FRUS) series. In addition, Volume XVIII (Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1964-1967), Volume XIX (Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967) and Volume XX (Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1967-1968) of the *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968* (FRUS) series were utilized as key resources. Using both the FRUS series and a number of other sources, chapter one begins by detailing the background of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, namely U.S. foreign policy towards Israel under the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. Chapters two through four explore the motivations behind President Kennedy's decision to end the arms embargo to Israel. Chapter two explains how the United States used the sale of Hawk missiles as compensation for potential Israeli concessions regarding the Negev Nuclear Research Centre that was being developed at the time at Dimona. Chapter three details how the Kennedy administration attempted to use the Hawk sale to advance the Johnson Plan, aimed at resettling Palestinian refugees. Chapter four provides an examination of why the Hawk was in part provided to Israel as a compensatory security guarantee aimed to offset Kennedy's tightening relationship with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Finally, chapters five and six examine the ramifications of the 1962 Hawk

sale to Israel. Chapter five details how Kennedy's decision to end the arms embargo to Israel laid the foundation for future arms sales to the Jewish state. The sixth and final chapter is an analysis of how the Hawk missile sale contributed to the arms spiral in the Middle East, namely increased Soviet arms sales to the United Arab Republic (UAR).⁴

⁴ The U.A.R. was a short-lived unification between Syria and Egypt that lasted from 1958 until 1961.

Chapter 1. Before Kennedy: U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Israel Under the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations

President John F. Kennedy's decision to sell Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel in August of 1962 was a considerable shift in American foreign policy towards the Jewish State. To fully understand why Kennedy broke the arms embargo, one must review the background of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, namely American foreign policy under Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower. Harry Truman entered office following the death of wartime President Franklin D. Roosevelt. According to author and American diplomat Samuel W. Lewis, several elements in the American conscience in the wake of WWII set the stage for the development of the U.S.-Israeli relationship. Among these factors was guilt in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the idealism associated with the creation of a democratic state, and religious identification.⁵

President Truman certainly fell under the influence of these factors.

Deeply moved by the Holocaust in Europe, Truman was sympathetic towards the Zionist plea for a Jewish state. At the same time, Truman aimed to maintain a friendly relationship with the Arabs throughout his administration. In his personal memoirs, released in 1956, he wrote, "it was my attitude that America could not stand by while the victims of Hitler's racial madness were denied the opportunities to build new lives. Neither, however, did I want to see a political structure imposed on the Near East that would result in conflict".⁶ As a southern Baptist, Truman also likely felt sympathy for the historic return of the Jews to the Biblical Holy Land.

Harry Truman took the Oath of Office on April 12, 1945. The new President wrote to the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee on August 31 of that same year. Acting in response to the

⁵ Samuel W. Lewis, "The United States and Israel: Evolution of an Unwritten Alliance," *Middle East Journal* 53, no. 3 (1999): 365, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4329351>.

⁶ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1956), 140.

dire situation of displaced Jews in post-war Europe, Truman urged Attlee to allow Jews to resettle in Palestine. He informed Attlee that “the American people, as a whole, firmly believe that immigration into Palestine should not be closed and that a reasonable number of Europe's persecuted Jews should, in accordance with their wishes, be permitted to resettle there”.⁷ In response to the refugee situation, the United States and Britain formed the “Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry”. In April of 1946, the Committee submitted the recommendation that the Land of Palestine should neither be an Arab State or a Jewish State. According to the Inquiry, the Administration of Palestine was to “facilitate Jewish immigration under suitable conditions”, including the immediate admission of 100,000 survivors of Nazi persecution.⁸ On May 8, 1946, the President once again wrote to the British Prime Minister in the hopes that Britain would lift the barriers to Jewish immigration to Palestine.⁹ Notably, despite Truman’s public support for resettlement, the President expressed concern and frustration in private. Writing in his diary on the evening of Monday July 21, 1947, Truman penned the following: “The Jews, I find are very, very selfish... when they have power, physical, financial or political neither Hitler nor Stalin has anything on them for cruelty or mistreatment to the under dog... I've found very, very few who remember their past condition when prosperity comes”.¹⁰

The United Nations passed Resolution 181, The United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine, on November 29, 1947. Granting 57 percent of the land in question to Israel and 43

⁷ “Letter to Prime Minister Attlee Concerning the Need for Resettlement of Jewish Refugees in Palestine,” Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, accessed September 17, 2014, <http://trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=481&st=&st1=>.

⁸ “Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry - Chapter I,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, accessed September 19, 2014, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/angch01.asp.

⁹ “The United States and the Recognition of Israel: A Chronology,” Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, accessed September 17, 2014, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/israel/palestin.htm>.

¹⁰ “Harry S. Truman 1947 Diary: July 21,” Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, accessed September 22, 2014, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/diary/page21.htm>.

percent to Palestine, the plan was approved with 33 votes in favor, and 13 votes against.¹¹ A mere six months after the United Nations passed Resolution 181, the British mandate over Palestine expired and Israel declared independence. At the Tel Aviv Museum, David Ben-Gurion read *The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel* to a gathered crowd.¹² Regardless of his doubts concerning the partition of Palestine, President Truman famously recognized the provisional government as the de facto authority of the new state of Israel only eleven minutes after Ben-Gurion declared independence.¹³ Truman's swift recognition of Israel, however, was no official guarantee of Israeli security.

In the immediate aftermath of the creation of the state of Israel, the United States was primarily concerned with controlling the flow of weapons to the Near East. In an effort to control arms sales, the United States, Britain and France issued the Tripartite Declaration on May 25, 1950. According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign affairs, it was an agreement not to supply arms to countries "harboring aggressive designs".¹⁴ More specifically, France, Britain, and the United States recognized that Israel and the Arab states had to maintain a certain level of armaments to allow for self-defense and internal security. Thus all applications for weapons would be considered both in light of these principles and with the aim of preventing a Middle East arms race.¹⁵ When President Dwight D. Eisenhower entered office on January 20, 1953, he continued the U.S. arms embargo set in place by President Truman.

¹¹ "UN General Assembly Resolution 181," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed September 19, 2014, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/Guide/Pages/UN%20General%20Assembly%20Resolution%20181.aspx>.

¹² "Declaration of Establishment of State of Israel," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed September 20, 2014, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/declaration%20of%20establishment%20of%20state%20of%20israel.aspx>.

¹³ "Draft of recognition of Israel, May 14, 1948," Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, accessed September 17, 2014, http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/israel/large/documents/index.php?documentdate=1948-05-14&documentid=48&collectionid=ROI&pagenumber=1.

¹⁴ "Tripartite Declaration Regarding Security in the Near East," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed September 14, 2014, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook1/pages/tripartite%20declaration%20regarding%20security%20in%20the%20n.aspx>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

By 1954, Israel had found its major arms supplier in France. This meant that the U.S. could “maintain good relations with the Arab States without having to compromise Israel’s security”.¹⁶ The balance of military power in the Middle East was tipped in the mid 1950’s with the announcement of the Czech-Egyptian arms agreement on September 27, 1955. This agreement marked Egypt’s clear shift away from the West and towards the Soviet Union.¹⁷ The United States, however, was determined not to get involved in an Arab-Israeli conflict and still hoped to establish an anti-Soviet defense in the Near East. The U.S. thus formulated its policy of “friendly impartiality”, opting not to directly sell arms to the Israelis or the Arabs.¹⁸ Secretary of State John Foster Dulles believed that the Arab states would undoubtedly misinterpret any sale of weapons to Israel as a American declaration of support for the Jewish state. Such action, he rightfully assumed, would likely have less than ideal political repercussions.¹⁹ This policy, however, did not sit well with Israel. Writing to the Secretary of State on December 12, 1955, Foreign Minister of Israel, Moshe Sharett, highlighted that while Soviet arms continued to reach Egypt, there had been no arms made available to Israel by the United States.²⁰ Unsurprisingly, Dulles rejected Israel’s request for arms when he replied on 29 December.²¹ While the administration refused to sell arms to Israel in late 1955 and early 1956, the United States did

¹⁶ Tal, “Symbol Not Substance?,” 305.

¹⁷ David Tal. “Weapons without influence: British arms supply policy and the Egyptian Czech arms deal, 1945–55,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34, no. 3 (2006): 369, accessed October 4, 2014, <http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/doi/pdf/10.1080/03086530600825985>.

¹⁸ Tal, “Symbol Not Substance?,” 305.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of a Conversation Between the President and the Secretary of State, Camp David, Maryland*, December 8, 1955, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v14/d442> (accessed September 24, 2014).

²⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Letter From Foreign Minister Sharett to Secretary of State Dulles*, December 12, 1955, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v14/d448> (accessed September 14, 2014).

²¹ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel*, December 29, 1955, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v14/d471> (accessed September 11, 2014).

secretly promote the sale of weapons to Israel from a number of countries including France and Nicaragua.²²

By the summer of 1956, Cold War tension was mounting in the Middle East. In July of that year, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, frustrated with Western colonial ambitions in the region, announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Having frozen the assets of the Suez Company, Nasser's decision outraged Britain and France, who held significant political influence in the Near East. While the United States certainly did have the military ability to force Nasser to cooperate, the Eisenhower administration was keenly aware of the strategic importance and potential source of instability of the Middle East in the Cold War. As such, Eisenhower aimed to avoid any hostilities in the region and instead planned to broker a diplomatic settlement to the dispute. Tension only mounted in October of 1956 when Israel, supported by Britain and France, attacked across Egypt's Sinai Peninsula in a poorly planned invasion. By the 29th of October, Israeli forces were within 10 miles of the Canal. While the Suez Crisis was brought to a halt on November 6, when the United States pressured France and Britain to accept a UN ceasefire, the crisis only worked to increase tension in the region.²³

The outbreak of the crisis in Lebanon in the summer of 1958 saw even further American involvement in the Middle East when the U.S. and Britain intervened to rescue the Lebanese government from pro-Nasser forces. As a contribution, Israel allowed British planes to fly over its territory.²⁴ Hoping that Eisenhower might be willing to put an end to the U.S. arms embargo in the light of Israel's cooperation throughout the crisis, the Israeli Ambassador to the United States, Abba Eban, attached a list to a letter he sent to Dulles on August 1, 1958, requesting eight

²² Tal, "Symbol Not Substance?," 305.

²³ "Milestones 1953-1960: The Suez Crisis 1956," U.S. Department of State, accessed April 7, 2015. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/suez>.

²⁴ Tal, "Symbol Not Substance?," 305.

items. The United States, however, deemed these requests excessive and continued to maintain that “political considerations militate against our being a large supplier of heavy military equipment to Israel. We prefer that the Israelis look elsewhere, particularly to the British and French, as they have in the past”.²⁵ While the Eisenhower administration maintained the arms embargo, it did continue to allow Israel to spend U.S. foreign aid on European weapons. Even though this did meet the military needs of Israel, Ben-Gurion continued to seek an official U.S. guarantee of Israeli security.²⁶

Israel’s campaign to specifically acquire the Hawk anti-aircraft missile was officially launched on February 9, 1960. Avraham Harman, the Israeli Ambassador to Washington, submitted a list of arms requests that included 530 tanks, 600 missiles of the Sidewinder and Hawk types, and 2 small submarines, among other requests. The U.S. turned down the request.²⁷ The following month, President Eisenhower met with David Ben-Gurion. The Israeli Prime Minister argued that the United Arab Republic was superior in both manpower and armaments, and that, if they could, the Egyptian forces would exterminate the Jews of Israel just as Hitler had tried to do in Europe. Like Truman, Eisenhower, was determined not to become a partisan supporter of any Middle Eastern state. According to a memorandum of conversation dated March 10, 1960, President Eisenhower stated, “the United States believes we should be friends to both sides so that we would be able to act as a mediator in any disputes that arise.”²⁸ In other words,

²⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Rountree) to the Secretary of State*, August 22, 1958, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d37> (accessed September 16, 2014).

²⁶ Tal, “Symbol Not Substance?,” 306.

²⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Jones) to the Secretary of State*, February 12, 1960, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d122> (accessed September 25, 2014).

²⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of a Conversation, White House, Washington, March 10, 1960, 11 a.m.* March 10, 1960, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d131> (accessed September 12, 2014).

Eisenhower believed that Europe could continue to better supply the Israeli Defense Force with weapons, allowing the U.S. to remain friends with both Israel and the Arab States.²⁹

By and large, the Department of Defence continued to see no reason to alter their policy concerning arms sales to Israel. Officials did recognize that there was gap in armaments between Israel and the Arab States, and that Arab armaments, especially those of the U.A.R., were more modern and more effective than those held by the Israelis. In spite of this, U.S. officials concluded that Israel was capable of defeating any combination of its Arab neighbors, as the Israeli Defense Force could be considered superior in factors such as “mobilization capability, leadership, training, organization, morale, and determination”.³⁰ While Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, John A. Dabney denied Israel’s need for the Hawk, he did recommend that the U.S. provide Israel with early warning and detection equipment.³¹ The idea that the United States should not supply Israel with the Hawk missile was not, however, universal. According to the memorandum of a meeting dated July 27, 1960, Secretary of State Christian Herter found it difficult to understand why America was refusing to allow Israel to purchase Hawk missiles considering their purely defensive character. Regardless, Herter and his senior aids ultimately concluded that missiles were not to be provided to Israel on the basis that doing so might lead to an increased arms race with the Russians backing Nasser.³²

The Israeli campaign to obtain Hawk missiles from the Eisenhower administration was halted in December of 1960 when the United States confirmed that Israel was building a nuclear

²⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of a Conversation, White House, Washington, March 10, 1960, 11 a.m.* March 10, 1960, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d131> (accessed September 12, 2014).

³⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Letter From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Dabney) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Hare)*, June 14, 1960, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d153> (accessed September 20, 2014).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum for the Files of a Meeting, Department of State, Washington, July 27, 1960*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d161> (accessed September 18, 2014).

installation at Dimona.³³ A telegram sent from Tel Aviv on December 3, 1960 mentioned a new 10 to 20 megawatt nuclear reactor designed by Israel. The installation was of great concern, especially considering that a reactor of this size “had not been mentioned in recent discussions regarding Israeli economic development plans”.³⁴ Deciding to move the campaign for the Hawk missile to the backburner, it was not until the beginning of the Kennedy administration that Israel would once again launch its campaign for an official U.S. guarantee of Israeli security in the form of the Hawk missile.

³³ Tal, “Symbol Not Substance?,” 309.

³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel*, December 9, 1960, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d178> (accessed September 15, 2014).

Chapter 2. Dimona: The Sale of Hawk Missiles as Compensation for Israeli Concessions Regarding The Negev Nuclear Research Center

Several factors were influential in leading to the Kennedy administration's decision to sell Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel in August 1962. First, deeply disturbed by the discovery of the Nuclear Research Center at Dimona and by the realization that Israel was on the brink of developing nuclear weapons, President Kennedy used the sale of Hawk missiles as compensation for Israeli concessions regarding Dimona, namely a halt to the Israeli nuclear program and agreeing to allow U.S. scientists to visit and inspect Dimona. Second, the sale of Hawk missiles was used as a compensatory security guarantee towards Israel in light of Kennedy's relationship with Gamal Abdel Nasser, the President of Egypt. Third, Kennedy sold the Hawk to advance the State Department's agenda of resettling Palestinian refugees. When considered collectively, the aforementioned factors all worked to influence Kennedy in his decision to sell Hawk missiles to the Jewish state. The first factor to be considered below is the discovery of the Negev Nuclear Research Center. A detailed discussion of the Palestinian refugee problem and Kennedy's relationship with the United Arab Republic will be presented in the following chapters.

According to a memorandum sent from Secretary of State Dean Rusk to President John F. Kennedy on January 30, 1961, rumours surrounding the construction of a significant nuclear reactor at Dimona reached the American Embassy in Tel Aviv in the summer and early fall of 1960.³⁵ These rumours were confirmed by U.S. intelligence in early December.³⁶ The 470th Meeting of the National Security Council, which aimed to address world developments affecting the security of the United States, further confirmed the details of the reactor. Allen Dulles, the Director of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), reported that the nuclear complex in the Negev

³⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy*, January 30, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d5> (accessed October 19, 2014).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

desert included a reactor capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium.³⁷ The CIA confirmed that, upon completion, the reactor would be capable of producing up to ten kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium in one year, enough for the creation of one atomic bomb.³⁸ Further still, the CIA and the United States Atomic Energy Commission expressed the belief that it was unlikely that the Israeli reactor was built merely for peaceful purposes.³⁹

In a telegram sent in early December 1960, Secretary of State Christian A. Herter wrote “we are very disturbed” concerning the nature and size of the reactor.⁴⁰ Similarly, in a letter from the Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, William B. Macomber, to the Executive Director of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, James T. Ramey, Macomber wrote the following: “any possibility of proliferation of nuclear weapons—particularly in the Middle East—obviously is a matter of grave concern to the Department”.⁴¹ More specifically, the concern centered on the fact that the administration feared the spread of nuclear weapons to the Arab states by the Soviet Union in response to Israel’s possible development of nuclear arms.⁴² Nearing the end of his term as the 34th President of the United States, Eisenhower asked Israel’s Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to confirm that Israel had no plans to manufacture atomic weapons. Much to Eisenhower’s dismay, Ben-Gurion hesitated.⁴³

When Kennedy took the oath of office on January 20, 1961, the United States

³⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Discussion at the 470th Meeting of the National Security Council*, December 8, 1960, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d177> (accessed October 20, 2014).

³⁸ Douglas Little, “The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-1968,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25 (1993): 567, accessed July 28, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/164535>.

³⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Discussion at the 470th Meeting of the National Security Council*, December 8, 1960, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d177> (accessed October 20, 2014).

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel*, December 9, 1960, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d178#fn2> (accessed October 27, 2014).

⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, *Letter From the Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations (Macomber) to the Executive Director of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy (Ramey)*, January 19, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d3> (accessed October 19, 2014).

⁴² U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy*, January 30, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d5> (accessed October 19, 2014).

⁴³ Little, “The Making of a Special Relationship,” 567.

Government had been aware of the nuclear installation for nearly two months. Kennedy voiced his concerns about the reactor during a transition briefing on December 6, 1960, telling Eisenhower that an “atomic development in Israel is highly distressing”.⁴⁴ Tension mounted in the spring of 1961 when the Kennedy administration learnt that Israel had plans to purchase medium-range bombers from the French, capable of carrying atomic bombs.⁴⁵ By the end of May, Israel had ordered a total of 60 Mirage IIIC planes from a manufacturer in France, all with bomb carrying capacity.⁴⁶

Unsurprisingly, Israel’s atomic energy program was a priority on the agenda when President Kennedy met with Prime Minister Ben-Gurion in May 1961.⁴⁷ The President and the Prime Minister met for the first and only time at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City.⁴⁸ Referring to Dimona in the context of Israel’s serious shortage of fresh water resources, the Israeli Prime Minister explained that Israel hoped to eventually utilize atomic power for the purpose of the desalinization of seawater.⁴⁹ Having said this, Ben-Gurion added “we do not know what will happen in the future; in three or four years we might have need for a plant to process plutonium”.⁵⁰ The conversation quickly evolved from the nuclear reactor at Dimona to the topic of the Middle East arms imbalance. According to Ben-Gurion, the arms deficit between

⁴⁴ Little, “The Making of a Special Relationship,” 567.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 568.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Conversation between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion*, May 30, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d57> (accessed October 17, 2014).

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Prime Minister Ben-Gurion’s Request for an Appointment with the President*, April 13, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d32> (accessed October 19, 2014).

⁴⁸ Little, “The Making of a Special Relationship,” 568.

⁴⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Conversation between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion*, May 30, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d57> (accessed October 17, 2014).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

the United Arab Republic and Israel was increasing.⁵¹ As such, Ben-Gurion used the opportunity to renew the Israeli request for Hawk missiles. Like Eisenhower, Kennedy refused, instead assuring the Israeli Prime-Minister that the United States would continue to closely monitor the situation.⁵²

While no security guarantee came from the meeting in New York City, the discussion linked the issue of Dimona and the Israeli request for Hawks. Like Eisenhower, Kennedy was disturbed by the thought that Israel was on the brink of developing nuclear weapons. At the same time, Israel's sense of vulnerability amidst hostile Arab neighbors and the lack of an official U.S. guarantee of Israeli security made Israel's quest for nuclear arms comprehensible. The United States was also well aware that Israel desired a formal security guarantee and access to more American military equipment, namely Hawk anti-aircraft missiles.⁵³ With this in mind, Kennedy looked to sell the Hawks to the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) as a compensatory carrot to help the United States meet their international goals.⁵⁴ Simply put, the promise of the eventual sale of Hawk missiles to the IDF would lead to Israeli concessions regarding its nuclear program, namely to halt the development of nuclear weapons at Dimona and to allow U.S. inspections of the facility.

According to a number of memoranda sent in the spring of 1961, providing Israel with a firm security commitment was the key to preventing the Jewish State from pursuing the development of nuclear weapons. For example, Robert W. Komer, a senior member of staff of the National Security Council, indicated that Israel was tired of receiving reassurances from the

⁵¹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Conversation between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion*, May 30, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d57> (accessed October 17, 2014).

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to Secretary of State Rusk*, July 9, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d2> (accessed October 22, 2014).

⁵⁴ Ben-Zvi, "Stumbling into an Alliance," 228.

United States without a tangible commitment to their security.⁵⁵ According a telegram sent from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, Avraham Harman, the Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., had stated that the United States government’s “professions of intent to support Israel” had not dispelled any anxiety.⁵⁶ Other memoranda speak to Israel’s sense of isolation.⁵⁷ According to Mordechai Gazit, the Minister of the Israeli Embassy in the United States, “if Israel had more in the way of a security commitment from the US, it would not have to pursue such an activist policy”.⁵⁸ Thus if Israel had a formal commitment in the form of the Hawk, it might be less likely to pursue the development of nuclear weapons. This was precisely the argument presented in favor of supplying Israel with the Hawk missiles. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Phillips Talbot, informed Secretary of State Dean Rusk on June 7, 1962, that the “possession of the Hawk would strengthen the weak link in Israel’s defenses and thereby reduce any temptation”.⁵⁹

Myer Feldman, a political aide in Kennedy’s administration, confirmed the link between Israel’s nuclear reactor at Dimona and the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles in a *New York Times* article published on June 16, 1968. In early 1961, Kennedy secretly sent Feldman to Israel to offer a firm commitment to Israeli security, namely the protection offered by the United States Sixth Fleet. At the same time, Feldman was also authorized to offer Ben-Gurion Hawk anti-aircraft missiles. According to Feldman in the *New York Times*, the missiles would be

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum for the Record: Luncheon with Israeli Minister Gazit*, April 30, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d259> (accessed October 22, 2014).

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel*, May 28, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d278> (accessed October 19, 2014).

⁵⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot)*, May 23, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d273> (accessed October 22, 2014).

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum for the Record, Luncheon with Israeli Minister Gazit*, April 30, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d259> (accessed October 22, 2014).

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to Secretary of State Rusk*, June 7, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d290> (accessed October 22, 2014).

offered in return for “not developing nuclear weapons of her own”.⁶⁰ President Kennedy believed that, provided with a formal commitment to their security, Israel would be prepared to restrict their development of nuclear weapons. Kennedy thus clearly intended to sell Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel as compensation for Israel’s agreement to halt any development or production of nuclear arms.

The second concession expected from Israel in return for the sale of the Hawk was that Israel must allow American scientists to visit and inspect the Negev Nuclear Research Center. In his book, *Danger and Survival: Choices about the Bomb in the First Fifty Years*, McGeorge Bundy, who acted as the 6th United States Security Advisor under President Kennedy, provides valuable insight into the motivations for the sale of the Hawk missiles to Israel. Referring to Myer Feldman’s secret journey to Israel in 1961 to offer Ben-Gurion the Hawk, Bundy notes that American visits to Dimona were central to the negotiations.⁶¹ According to Bundy, one of the conditions for receiving the Hawk was as follows: “Israel would permit regular visits by Americans to Dimona, where they could judge for themselves whether or not the installation was part of a weapons program”.⁶² Ultimately, The United States sent American scientists Messrs. U.M. Staebler and J.W. Croach to inspect the Dimona reactor in May 1961.⁶³ According to Lucius D. Battle, the inspection provided the U.S. with valuable information regarding the size of the reactor, resources available, and the purpose of the installation. Battle noted, “while, like others of its size and character, the reactor eventually will produce small quantities of plutonium

⁶⁰ “61 Pledge to Israel by U.S. is Confirmed,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1968, accessed November 2, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/docview/118269398/A56D7F5C5F2B4D11PQ/29?accountid=14656>.

⁶¹ Little, “The Making of a Special Relationship,” 568-569.

⁶² McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices about the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988), 510.

⁶³ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Battle) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)*, May 26, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d53> (accessed October 15, 2014).

suitable for weapons, there is no present evidence that the Israelis have weapons production in mind”.⁶⁴ This conclusion was undoubtedly reassuring to the United States, which so feared the proliferation of nuclear arms. Regardless, the U.S. government expected to be able to conduct further inspections of Dimona to ensure the reactors continued to be used for non-military purposes and to reassure Israel’s Arab neighbors of the peaceful nature of Dimona.⁶⁵

To be sure, it is clear in hindsight that Israel continued its development of weapons of mass destruction and is today one of nine nations in possession of nuclear weapons. Regardless, and as demonstrated above, the discovery of the Negev Nuclear Research Centre at Dimona in 1960 played a major role in the decision to sell Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to the Israeli Defense Force in August 1962. Disturbed by the prospect of the Israelis developing nuclear weapons, President Kennedy used the sale of the Hawk as compensation for Israeli concessions regarding Dimona. Most importantly, regular visits by U.S. scientists to the reactor provided American peace of mind on the topic of nuclear arms proliferation in the Middle East. While Dimona was an important factor in motivating the sale of the Hawk to Israel, one must also consider other factors that were at play at the time. The following chapters will examine Kennedy’s desire to resettle Palestinian refugees and his tightening relationship with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

⁶⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Battle) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)*, May 26, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d53> (accessed October 15, 2014).

⁶⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to Secretary of State Rusk*, June 7, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d290> (accessed October 22, 2014).

Chapter 3. Kennedy and Nasser: The Impact of U.S. PL-480 Aid to Egypt on the Sale of Hawk Missiles to Israel

With eight inches of fresh snow on the ground in Washington, D.C., U.S. Army flamethrowers were used to help clear the snow from Pennsylvania Avenue in preparation for the Forty-Fourth Inaugural Ceremonies on January 20, 1961.⁶⁶ Lifting his right hand in the January cold, a young John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK) stood before Chief Justice Earl Warren, who administered the Oath of Office in front of a gathered crowd.⁶⁷ At only 43 years of age, Kennedy entered the White House as the 35th President of the United States. At the same time, in Cairo, a young Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was serving as the 2nd President of Egypt, welcomed the inauguration of the new American president. Early in the New Year of 1961, Nasser cabled Kennedy, expressing his hope for better relations between their two nations.⁶⁸ To be sure, the Kennedy years did mark a clear rapprochement between the United States and the United Arab Republic (U.A.R.). Notably, the Kennedy Administration aimed to improve U.S.-U.A.R. relations by providing financial assistance to Egypt in the form of Public Law-480 aid, or Food for Peace. This tightening relationship between Kennedy and Nasser, however, would ultimately have a profound impact on U.S.-Israeli relations.

In the midst of the Cold War tension between the United States and Russia, the U.S. aimed to contain the threat of Communism in the Middle East. Fearing the influence of the Kremlin on neutralists like Nasser, Kennedy believed that failing to establish closer ties with Egypt would be “an open invitation to the Soviet Union to exploit discontent and hunger” in

⁶⁶ “Inaugural Weather,” Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, accessed November 19, 2014, <http://www.inaugural.senate.gov/swearing-in/weather>.

⁶⁷ “President Kennedy swears Oath of Office,” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed November 19, 2014, http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Ut_a-Ncynkypyx5rNJKcGQ.aspx.

⁶⁸ Douglas Little, “The New Frontier on the Nile: JFK, Nasser, and Arab Nationalism,” *The Journal of American History* 75 (1988): 504, accessed September 9, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/stable/1887868>.

Egypt.⁶⁹ Robert W. Komer notified McGeorge Bundy that the new American policy towards the U.A.R. was defined as “a policy of limited objectives but one which will set us on the path toward a more constructive relationship resembling that of the pre-1955 period, and break the vicious circle of aloofness in U.S./U.A.R. relations”.⁷⁰ President Kennedy’s attempt to tighten the U.S.-U.A.R. relationship thus became the cornerstone of the Administration’s foreign policy in the Middle East, whereby the U.S. was determined to provide the Egypt with an alternative to relying on the Soviets.

Acting with this policy in mind, Kennedy appointed the President of the Near East Foundation, John S. Badeau, as the United States Ambassador to the U.A.R. in 1961.⁷¹ Badeau was fluent in Arabic and had served as the President of the American University in Cairo from 1945 to 1953.⁷² Most importantly, he was also on good terms with high-ranking Egyptian officials including Anwar el-Sadat and Gamal Abdel Nasser.⁷³ When Badeau met with Egyptian President Nasser in 1961 to present his credentials, he helped to launch a new accord between the two nations. Recognizing that starting every conversation with an argument about Palestine was unproductive, Badeau and Nasser agreed to put the issue in the “icebox” and chose to devote themselves to “points of mutual interest”.⁷⁴ By May 5, 1961, Secretary of State Dean Rusk confirmed this shift, detecting a “favorable trend in U.S.-U.A.R. relations”.⁷⁵ Kennedy continued the momentum in a friendly telegram sent to the Embassy in Egypt on May 11, 1961. “The

⁶⁹ Little, “The New Frontier on the Nile,” 502.

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)*, December 8, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d149> (accessed November 17, 2014).

⁷¹ Obituary of John S. Badeau, *New York Times*, August 26, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/26/obituaries/j-s-badeau-former-envoy-to-middle-east-dies-at-92.html> (accessed November 14, 2014).

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Little, “The New Frontier on the Nile,” 505.

⁷⁴ John S. Badeau, “John S. Badeau, Oral History Interview,” Interview by Dennis J. O’Brien, February 25, 1969: 8, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKOH-JSB-01.aspx>.

⁷⁵ Little, “The New Frontier on the Nile,” 505.

United States”, Kennedy wrote, “will to the best of its ability lend every appropriate assistance to all Middle Eastern states that are determined to control their own destiny, to enhance the prosperity of their people, and to allow their neighbors to pursue the same fundamental aims”.⁷⁶

To be sure, the Kennedy Administration knew that they would be unable to bring Egypt fully into the Western camp.⁷⁷ Kennedy did, however, aim to ensure that Nasser remained neutral and did not feel the need to rely economically on the Soviet Union. On June 6, 1961, the President’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Walt Rostow, sent a message concerning Nasser to George McGhee, who was serving as the Chairman of the Policy Planning Council. Rostow noted the following: “I sense from current intelligence that Nasser is worried about three things: Syria; his economic position in general; and his over-commitment to Moscow economically... . We can help him to a degree on all three fronts”.⁷⁸ Rostow met the Egyptian Ambassador, Mustafa Kamel, in Washington later that year. After making a number of general points, the conversation quickly turned towards U.S.-Egyptian economic relations.⁷⁹ According to the memorandum of conversation, Kamel “thought it was crucial to the future stability of Egypt and to U.S.-Egyptian relations to expand systematically our economic cooperation”. In the eyes of the United States, this was the perfect opportunity to tighten the U.S.-U.A.R. relationship. Summing up the American stance in a communication sent to Bundy on December

⁷⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Arab Republic*, May 11, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d47> (accessed November 17, 2014).

⁷⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Rostow)*, June 30, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d74> (accessed November 19, 2014).

⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Rostow) to the Chairman of the Policy Planning Council (McGhee)*, June 6, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d63> (accessed November 16, 2014).

⁷⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation Between the President’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Rostow) and the United Arab Republic Ambassador (Kamel)*, November 22 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d144> (accessed November 16, 2014).

8, 1961, Komer noted “perhaps our greatest gains would be negative; we would not get a great deal from Nasser, but at least we might restrain him from doing a lot of things we don’t like”.⁸⁰

By 1962, Egypt, traditionally a food exporting country, faced a severe economic crisis.⁸¹ With only six million acres of Egyptian land under cultivation due to crop failures, the U.A.R. was unable to produce enough grain to feed its own population, let alone have any surplus for export.⁸² Exacerbating the problem, the Egyptian population of 26 million people was projected to grow at a rate of 2½ percent per year, worsening the already severe shortages.⁸³ The U.S. was acutely aware of Nasser’s financial struggles and intended to use the opportunity to “pull Nasser back toward a more neutral position, and deter him from leaning too far left again”.⁸⁴ Komer informed Kennedy on January 15, 1962, that the Department of State argued in favor of providing Egypt with increased aid. He proposed “to seize the perhaps fleeting opportunity created by Egypt’s severe economic plight”, contending that such a opportunity offered the United States a chance to open a “new chapter” and steer Egypt away from the Soviet bloc.⁸⁵

Accordingly, on October 8, 1962, the United States and Egypt signed a three-year agreement under Title I of the Public Law 480 aid program, the Food for Peace program, for the delivery of surplus U.S. grain to the U.A.R. for local currency.⁸⁶ The value of the shipments in the first year of the agreement totaled almost \$97 million and included commodities such as

⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)*, December 8, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d149> (accessed November 17, 2014).

⁸¹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Administrator of the Agency for International Development (Hamilton) to President Kennedy*, April 14, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d249> (accessed November 16, 2014).

⁸² U.S. Aid, *U.S. Economic Assistance to United Arab Republic*, Cairo: 1963, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacq043.pdf (accessed November 13, 2014).

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy*, January 15, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d163> (accessed November 12, 2014).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ U.S. Aid, *U.S. Economic Assistance to United Arab Republic*, Cairo: 1963, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacq043.pdf (accessed November 13, 2014).

wheat, wheat flour, vegetable oil, corn, tallow, frozen poultry and non-fat dried milk.⁸⁷ Perhaps most significantly, the Food for Peace program allowed Egypt to acquire food from the United States without having to drain precious foreign exchange reserves.⁸⁸ Fowler Hamilton, the Administrator of the Agency for International Development told President Kennedy on April 14, 1962, that “by saving scarce foreign exchange reserves, which would ordinarily be used to purchase the required food, the U.A.R. was able to purchase capital goods from hard currency areas, including the U.S., and thus become less dependent upon assistance from the Soviet Bloc to meet its capital needs”.⁸⁹

While the PL-480 aid certainly helped alleviate food shortages, The United States, and Israel, remained keenly aware that U.S. financial support also allowed Nasser to redirect his strapped financial recourses towards the purchase of Soviet arms.⁹⁰ Knowing that American aid would indirectly assist Nasser to purchase Soviet weapons, Kennedy opted to nevertheless support Egypt based on long-term calculations that it was in America’s interest to encourage Nasser to remain neutral.⁹¹ Unsurprisingly, Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, did not share Kennedy’s optimism.

Israel was concerned about the arms imbalance between the Jewish State and Egypt from the very beginning of the Kennedy Administration, long before the United States and Egypt signed the three-year PL-480 aid agreement. In a memorandum of conversation dated February 16, 1961, Israeli Ambassador Avraham Harman noted, for example, that of all the elements of

⁸⁷ U.S. Aid, *U.S. Economic Assistance to United Arab Republic*, Cairo: 1963, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacq043.pdf (accessed November 13, 2014).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Administrator of the Agency for International Development (Hamilton) to President Kennedy*, April 14, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d249> (accessed November 16, 2014).

⁹⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy*, January 15, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d163> (accessed November 12, 2014).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

anxiety in the Middle East, “rearmament is the most sensitive”.⁹² According to Harman, the U.A.R. had, since 1957, been acquiring MIG-19 fighter aircraft from the Soviets.⁹³ The MIG-19 would be able to deliver air-to-air missiles and was far superior to any plane possessed by the Israeli Defense force.⁹⁴ After noting that Soviet training crews had apparently now arrived in Egypt, Harman pointed to the fact that Israel had asked for Hawk anti-aircraft missiles from the United States a year previously, to no avail.⁹⁵ The United States was, of course, well aware of Israel’s Hawk requests and security concerns regarding Egypt. According to a National Intelligence Estimate from the summer of 1961 titled *Nasser and the Future of Arab Nationalism*, Egypt maintained “the only Arab armed forces with any significant potential against Israel”.⁹⁶ Regardless, the Kennedy Administration had not yet resolved to supply Israel with Hawk missiles.

As discussed above, by the late fall of 1961, the United States had resolved to take advantage of the opportunity to provide Egypt with increased economic aid. On December 8, 1961, Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff confirmed Israel’s stance on the issue. Komer informed McGeorge Bundy that “the Israelis have said they would applaud rather than oppose an effort to turn Nasser’s energies inward, but they are not unaware that any strengthening of the U.A.R. may eventually be at their expense”.⁹⁷ Kennedy was determined to forge a closer relationship with Nasser but recognized that doing so would not be an easy task. Commenting on the situation early in 1962, Secretary of State Dean Rusk noted that “aid for the

⁹² U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Israel’s Security and Other Problems*, February 16, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d12> (accessed November 18, 2014).

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ U.S. Department of State, *National Intelligence Estimate (Nasser and the Future of Arab Nationalism)*, June 27, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d68> (accessed November 15, 2014).

⁹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)*, December 8, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d149> (accessed November 17, 2014).

U.A.R.—the enemy of Israel and a leading neutral—is not easy to sell”.⁹⁸ One way to appease Israel, however, would be to provide the Jewish State with some sort of compensatory security measure. This was exactly what Myer Feldman proposed on January 15, 1962. Feldman argued that it was important to parallel “what will appear to many as an endorsement of Nasser regime” with compensatory gestures towards Israel.⁹⁹

Recognizing this opportunity, Israel began to use the fact that the U.S. was providing economic aid to Egypt as a factor in their campaign to acquire Hawk anti-aircraft missiles. On April 30th, 1962, Robert Komer met Mordechai Gazit, the Minister of the Israeli Embassy in the United States, to discuss a “number of problems concerning his government”.¹⁰⁰ According to Komer, Gazit’s principle goal was to introduce the idea that Israel could accept American economic support of Nasser’s Egypt “so long as they were adequately reassured with respect to U.S. guarantees to them”.¹⁰¹ The Israelis were well aware that by providing food resources to Egypt, the United States was indirectly assisting Egypt’s ability to purchase of Soviet arms. Already nervous about Nasser’s growing fleet of Soviet planes, Israel also wanted something in return from the United States. In May 1962, Shimon Peres, the Israeli Deputy Defense Minister, further requested U.S. compensation in informal conversations with both the Department of State and the Department of Defense. Like Gazit, Peres argued that expanded American assistance to Egypt had increased Israel’s security concerns as “it enables Nasser to continue a rearmament

⁹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy*, January 10, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d159> (accessed November 14, 2014).

⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy*, January 15, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d163> (accessed November 12, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy*, January 10, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d159> (accessed November 14, 2014).

¹⁰¹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum for the Record: Luncheon with Israeli Minister Gazit*, April 30, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d259> (accessed November 17, 2014).

program with USSR while dealing with critical domestic economic problems”.¹⁰² With easy access to Soviet naval vessels, planes and other equipment, Nasser was “making substantial strides towards his military superiority goal”, which would inevitably end in a strike against the Jewish state.¹⁰³ In Peres’s view, the United States owed Israel a “compensatory gesture”.¹⁰⁴

Luckily for Israel, the United States similarly concluded that compensatory measures towards Israel were necessary in light of their economic support of Egypt. By the late spring of 1962, this became especially apparent. Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council, informed President Kennedy that the “Shah, Saud, Hussein, and the Israelis are all vocally unhappy at the shift in our policy. They are not persuaded by our argument that if we don’t help Nasser he’ll become even more mortgaged to Moscow. But the only serious problem was that of the Israeli-Arab balance, which we are seeking to preserve by compensatory moves”.¹⁰⁵ Three days later, in a memorandum to Myer Feldman, Komer suggested that perhaps the Hawk anti-aircraft missile should be offered to Israel as a “measure to sustain a balance between the Arabs and Israel”.¹⁰⁶ To be sure, arms limitations still remained a key objective of the United States in the Middle East. According to Komer, the United States still intended to attempt to promote mutual arms limitations and to request that Nasser refrain from purchasing weapons from the Soviets. Knowing that this was unlikely, Komer concluded “this at least will serve to justify our stand if we later sell Hawks to Israelis”.¹⁰⁷ By the end of June, the decision to sell Hawk anti-

¹⁰² U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel*, May 24, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d275> (accessed November 13, 2014).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy*, May 28, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d279> (accessed November 12, 2014).

¹⁰⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Deputy Special Counsel (Feldman)*, May 31, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d282> (accessed November 17, 2014).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

aircraft missiles to Israel as compensation for U.S. economic aid in Egypt was essentially determined. A communication dated June 22, 1962 indicated that by this time, both the Department of State and the Department of Defense favored selling Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel.¹⁰⁸ The formal offer to sell Hawk missiles to Israel would be made by August of 1962.

As demonstrated above, Kennedy's attempt to tighten U.S.-U.A.R. relations was an important factor in the American decision to sell Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to the Israeli Defense Force in August of 1962. Determined to prevent the spread of communism in the Middle East, the United States aimed to provide Egypt with an alternative to relying on the Soviet Union for economic aid. Accordingly, the Kennedy Administration offered Nasser a three-year PL-480 aid package, or Food for Peace aid, to help combat production shortages in Egypt. The United States ultimately hoped that providing aid to Egypt would encourage the country to maintain their neutralist position. Understanding that providing aid to the U.A.R. was in America's long-term interest, the Administration also opted to provide nervous Israel with a compensatory security guarantee, the Hawk missile. While the tightening U.S.-U.A.R. relationship is thus clearly an important factor in the sale of the Hawk to Israel, one last factor must be considered. The next chapter of this paper turns towards the Palestinian refugee crisis.

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)*, June 22, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d306> (accessed November 14, 2014).

Chapter 4. The Palestinian Refugee Problem

In 1939, a twenty-two year old John Kennedy travelled to Palestine in an effort to better understand the Middle East. Shortly before continuing on to Romania, the Harvard undergrad penned a letter to his father, Joseph Kennedy, to comment on his travels and the proposed British White Paper of that same year. Summing up the desperate situation in the Middle East, JFK noted, “I see no hope for the working out of the policy as laid down in the White Paper”.¹⁰⁹ Just as Kennedy had suspected, the situation did not improve and the 1948 Arab Israeli war resulted in thousands of Palestinian refugees. By the time Kennedy entered office in 1961, the situation was desperate and the President ambitioned to resolve the crisis. The final factor that led to the decision to sell Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel was thus this Palestinian refugee problem.

This chapter will outline both the Kennedy Administration’s interest in resettling Palestinian refugees and Israel’s opposition to the Johnson Refugee Plan, being the plan to resettle Palestinian refugees created by Dr. Joseph Johnson of the Palestinian Conciliation Commission. This chapter will also detail the American decision to provide Israel with the Hawk missile in the hopes that David Ben-Gurion would be willing to accept refugees knowing that the Jewish State had secured from the United States an official guarantee of Israeli security.

Shortly after the Inauguration, John F. Kennedy met briefly with Deputy Special Council Myer Feldman to determine what should be done in the region of the Middle East.¹¹⁰ While virtually unknown to the public, Feldman became a key figure in the Kennedy Administration, working as a principle adviser on American policy and acting as Kennedy’s ‘behind-the-scenes

¹⁰⁹ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, “Letter written to his father following trip to Palestine, 1939,” accessed February 6, 2015, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-135-001.aspx>.

¹¹⁰ Myer Feldman, “Myer Feldman Oral History Interview,” Interview by John F. Stewart, August 20, 1966: 397, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKOH-MF-09.aspx>.

liaison' to Israel.¹¹¹ Recalling the encounter in a 1966 interview, Feldman noted that at the time of their meeting, President Kennedy was concerned about the 'history of failures' in the Middle East.¹¹² Troubled by the turbulence of the region, Kennedy aimed to fulfill his commitment to try to find a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹¹³ Seeking advice, Kennedy asked Feldman what he believed could be done in the region. Considering the situation, Feldman replied that he believed peace could be attained if the cause of the friction could be removed. Somewhat naively, Feldman noted in retrospect during his 1966 interview, he chose to inform the President that one of the major areas of friction in the Middle East was the question of Palestinian refugees.¹¹⁴ In total, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War forced upwards of 700,000 Palestinian refugees to flee their homes.¹¹⁵ Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion felt that Israel was in no way responsible for the wellbeing of these refugees.¹¹⁶ At the same time, Arab governments feared that if they accepted these refugees, they would be admitting the permanence of the Jewish state in Palestine.¹¹⁷ In most cases, Palestinian refugees were thus left with nowhere to turn. While there had been efforts on the part of the United States to repatriate Palestinian refugees in the past, all of these efforts had failed.¹¹⁸ Many American officials now feared that if real progress was not made in resettling Palestinian refugees, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser might be tempted to discard his 'icebox' approach towards the Jewish

¹¹¹ Obituary of Myer Feldman. *New York Times*. March 3, 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/03/obituaries/03feldman.html?_r=0 (accessed November 21, 2014).

¹¹² Feldman, "Myer Feldman Oral History Interview," 398.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ The United Nations Refugee Agency, *The United Nations and Palestinian Refugees: January 2007 Report*, 2. <http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2010011791015.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ Feldman, "Myer Feldman Oral History Interview," 399.

¹¹⁷ Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 105.

¹¹⁸ Feldman, "Myer Feldman Oral History Interview," 399.

state.¹¹⁹ Myer Feldman and President Kennedy concluded their meeting by determining that perhaps a solution to the refugee crisis could be achieved by discussing it discreetly with both Egypt's Nasser and Israel's Ben-Gurion.¹²⁰

For the Kennedy Administration, settling the Palestinian refugee crisis was yet another way to try and win over Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. As previously stated, tightening the relationship between the United States and the United Arab Republic was a key objective of the Administration. Like President Eisenhower before him, Kennedy adhered to the belief that establishing close ties with the Arab states was the best way to prevent the spread of communism to the Middle East.¹²¹ In addition, the Kennedy Administration felt that tackling the refugee problem was the best way to make progress on resolving other issues such as the Arab League boycott, the status of Jerusalem and Suez transit.¹²² With these issues in mind, Kennedy wrote letters to a number of Arab leaders in the spring of 1961. In these letters, Kennedy pledged to work towards resolving the Palestinian refugee problem, and more broadly, finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹²³ Concerning the Palestinian refugee problem, Kennedy assured that “there will be no lack of United States interest in seeing that effective action is taken”.¹²⁴ Going further, Kennedy appealed to the Arab leaders, stating, “it is my sincere hope that all the parties directly concerned will cooperate fully with whatever program is undertaken by the Commission so that the best interests and welfare of all the Arab refugees of Palestine may be protected and

¹¹⁹ Douglas Little, “The New Frontier on the Nile,” 568.

¹²⁰ Feldman, “Myer Feldman Oral History Interview,” 399.

¹²¹ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 104-105.

¹²² U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Acting Secretary of State Bowles to President Kennedy*, April 28, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d38> (accessed November 20, 2014).

¹²³ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Arab Republic*, May 11, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d47> (accessed November 20, 2014).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

advanced".¹²⁵ From the very beginning of his presidency, John F. Kennedy was thus committed to launching a campaign to resolve the thirteen-year-old problem of Palestinian refugees.

While the United States pushed for a solution to the Palestinian Refugee problem, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion remained uninterested. In the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Israel spoke in terms of the repatriation of a large number of Palestinian refugees, suggesting the possibility that up to 150,000 could return to their homeland.¹²⁶ By 1961, however, the Jewish State appeared to have considerably reversed their policy, preferring that Palestinian refugees turn towards Arab countries for resettlement.¹²⁷ The United States expressed disappointment over Israel's stance and urged Israel to make concessions regarding the refugees.¹²⁸ Adlai E. Stevenson, the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, spoke with David Ben-Gurion on the topic in early June 1961. Stevenson told Ben-Gurion that the United States believed that Israel should accept Palestinian refugees and that it was unrealistic to expect surrounding Arab nations to absorb the refugees as the only solution.¹²⁹ Israel's hesitation to allow the repatriation of Palestinian refugees, however, extended far beyond the desire to maintain a Jewish majority. Ben-Gurion, for his part, feared a breach of Israeli security. According to the Prime Minister, "Nasser will send his army into Israel behind refugees".¹³⁰

On July 12, 1961, the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Walworth Barbour, met with Israeli Foreign Minister, Golda Meir, to further discuss the situation. Over lunch Meir similarly

¹²⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Arab Republic*, May 11, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d47> (accessed November 20, 2014).

¹²⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to Secretary of State Rusk*, May 1, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d39> (accessed November 20, 2014).

¹²⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Mission to the United Nations to the Department of State*, June 22, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d60> (accessed November 20, 2014).

¹²⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to Secretary of State Rusk*, May 1, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d39> (accessed November 20, 2014).

¹²⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Mission to the United Nations to the Department of State*, June 22, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d60> (accessed November 20, 2014).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

expressed concern over Israel's security.¹³¹ Reflecting on the meeting Barbour concluded, "I appreciate that this conversation probably served little to advance us in the desirable direction of this problem and I do not believe that the attitude expressed can be described as encouraging".¹³² Golda Meir further elaborated on her concerns in a later conversation with Walworth Barbour and Phillips Talbot. Meir was especially disturbed by the American suggestion that Palestinian refugees should have free choice in deciding whether to settle in Israel or in the Arab States.¹³³ While she believed that the United States would not support a program intentionally aimed to compromise Israeli security, she feared that "good intentions are not always enough".¹³⁴

In an attempt to craft a solution, President Kennedy once again met Myer Feldman in the spring of 1961. Feldman suggested that the United States send an exploratory mission to the Middle East to determine exactly how far both Israel and the Arab States could be encouraged to accept refugees.¹³⁵ In considering the potential candidates, President Kennedy ultimately selected Joseph E. Johnson, the head of the Carnegie Foundation for this important mission.¹³⁶ Kennedy and Feldman also concluded that the mission should be conducted through the Palestine Conciliation Commission.¹³⁷ Once the details of the operation were ironed out, Johnson set out on his mission in November of 1961.¹³⁸ Johnson began by consulting the Arab governments. As anticipated, the Arab States feared that the resettlement scheme would result in 'permanently consigning' the Palestinian refugees to their care. Accepting these refugees, they feared, would signify the acceptance of Israel's permanence in the Middle East and would present an economic

¹³¹ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State*, July 12, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d85> (accessed November 20, 2014).

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State*, November 1, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d136> (accessed November 20, 2014).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Feldman, "Myer Feldman Oral History Interview," 400-401.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 401.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 402.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 403.

burden.¹³⁹ Israel was similarly unreceptive. A November 1961 communication sent with the subject *Israel Position Re Arab Refugees* confirmed what the Kennedy administration had hoped to avoid: a clear hardening of Israel's position vis-à-vis the Palestinian refugee problem. As it turned out, Israel was much less flexible than the President had earlier hoped.¹⁴⁰

Upon his return to the United States, Johnson met with Feldman and President Kennedy to discuss his mission.¹⁴¹ At this meeting Johnson was asked to summarize his recommendations. The 'Johnson Plan' was subsequently unveiled in August of 1962. In his report, Joseph E. Johnson recommended that the Palestinian refugees should be offered the choice to either return to their homes in present-day Israel or be resettled in a Arab state with cash compensation. The Plan recommended that Israel should accept up to a total of 100,000 refugees over the span of the following ten years.¹⁴² It was estimated that the United States would contribute \$1 billion, covering approximately 60% of the projected cost of resettlement and repatriation.¹⁴³ Considering the Johnson Plan, President Kennedy concluded, "well, I guess our only chance with the Israelis at least is to get it presented favorably".¹⁴⁴

Myer Feldman recalled the unveiling of the Johnson Plan in a 1966 interview. According to Feldman, the President looked around the room after learning the details of the Plan and fixed his eyes on Feldman. The President then proposed, "how about you going over and getting them to accept it?".¹⁴⁵ Knowing that Israel would be highly suspicious of the plan, Feldman knew it would be a tough sale. Feldman thus informed the President, "I'd have to offer them something

¹³⁹ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 105.

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Israel position Re Arab Refugees*, November 14, 1961, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d139> (accessed November 21, 2014).

¹⁴¹ Feldman, "Myer Feldman Oral History Interview," 406.

¹⁴² Little, "The New Frontier on the Nile," 568.

¹⁴³ Herbert Druks, *Uncertain Friendship: The U. S. & Israel from Roosevelt to Kennedy* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 221.

¹⁴⁴ Feldman, "Myer Feldman Oral History Interview," 407.

¹⁴⁵ Feldman, "Myer Feldman Oral History Interview," 408.

in return because all we are doing is asking them to take a position that they had rejected in the past".¹⁴⁶ Feldman knew that there was one item capable of drastically altering Israel's threat perception, the Hawk anti-aircraft missile. Believing that Israel would be much more receptive to making concessions on the Palestinian refugee problem from a position of power and security, Feldman launched his campaign to tie the offer of the Hawk missile to the repatriation of refugees. Key to Feldman's plan was the idea of 'expected reciprocity'. He insisted that the missile should be provided to Israel to encourage Ben-Gurion to shift his position regarding the refugee crisis.¹⁴⁷ This view was echoed in a letter sent from Feldman to President Kennedy on August 10, 1962. According to Feldman, "the only chance the plan has for success is to accompany it with notice to Ben-Gurion that we will guarantee the security of Israel and provide Hawk missiles... ..I should like to be in the position of notifying him that we will provide Hawks at the time we request his acquiescence in the Johnson plan".¹⁴⁸ Ultimately Kennedy agreed to offer the Hawk to Israel without establishing any binding pre-conditions for the sale.¹⁴⁹ Under the ruse of taking a summer vacation to the Isle of Rhodes with his wife, Feldman thus departed for Israel on August 18 to try and convince David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir to accept the Johnson Plan.¹⁵⁰

Feldman met with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister on August 19, 1962. Beginning the meeting, Feldman offered the Hawk anti-aircraft missile to Israel without making it dependent on any preconditions. Next, Feldman turned towards the Johnson Plan, gently

¹⁴⁶ Feldman, "Myer Feldman Oral History Interview," 408.

¹⁴⁷ Abraham Ben-Zvi, "Influence and Arms: John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and the Politics of Arms Sales to Israel, 1962-1966," in *Israel: The First Hundred Years: Volume IV*, edited by Efraim Karsh (Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004), 36.

¹⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the President's Deputy Special Counsel (Feldman) to President Kennedy*, August 10, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d18> (accessed November 21, 2014).

¹⁴⁹ Ben-Zvi, "Influence and Arms," 36.

¹⁵⁰ Feldman, "Myer Feldman Oral History Interview," 412.

reminding the Prime Minister that “he agreed that the solution to the refugee problem would be worth a try”.¹⁵¹ In their second meeting, Meir, Ben-Gurion and Feldman focused the discussion on how many refugees Israel would allow to return to the country. Eventually Ben-Gurion concluded that Israel would accept only one out of every ten refugees, the other nine being required to resettle in neighboring Arab States.¹⁵² While this was certainly less than what Feldman hoped for, the State Department responded favorably to his report saying, “this is a good job. This is the most we could expect from Israel”.¹⁵³ The Department of State, it would appear, was happy with even a partial concession over none at all.

Despite apparent advances, the Johnson Plan crumbled in the following weeks. After Feldman presented the Johnson Plan to Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir, the State Department agreed to sixty-two changes before the Plan was presented to the United Nations. The State Department had resolved to make the Plan slightly more favorable to the Arab States, believing that Ben-Gurion’s government would still approve it. According to Feldman, “The State Department had gotten together with Johnson while I was in Israel to, as I saw it, make the plan somewhat more favorable to the Arab nations because in the basis of my cable they had concluded that the Israeli Government would still agree to the Plan”.¹⁵⁴ The Israeli Government, however, felt that these new changes both threatened security and infringed on Israel’s sovereignty.¹⁵⁵ With the Hawk missiles already in hand, Israel thus withdrew from any prior commitment. Feldman was furious. Contacting the State Department regarding the changes, he wrote, “well, they (the changes) made enough difference so that there’s a basis for Golda saying

¹⁵¹ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State*, August 19, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d24> (accessed November 21, 2014).

¹⁵² Feldman, “Myer Feldman Oral History Interview,” 417.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 423.

¹⁵⁵ Ben-Zvi, “Influence and Arms,” 37.

this is not what we agreed to”.¹⁵⁶ The Johnson Plan, and the Administration’s hope to solve the Palestinian refugee crisis, was over.

While the Johnson Plan ultimately failed, it is clear that the United States was motivated to provide the Hawk missiles to Israel in the hope that the Jewish State would ultimately allow the repatriation of Palestinian refugees. In an effort to entice Israel to act out of good faith the United States offered the Jewish State missiles with essentially no strings attached.

Along with the discovery of the Dimona Nuclear Research Center and Kennedy’s attempt to strengthen ties between the U.S. and the U.A.R., the Palestinian refugee problem marks the third factor that influenced Kennedy to sell the Hawk missiles to Israel in August of 1962. Reflecting on this sale in light of the Palestinian refugee problem, Robert W. Komer made it clear to Kennedy in 1963 that the Administration did not intend to repeat the same mistake of providing weapons without reciprocation. Komer noted, “given the Hawk/refugee episode of last year, we want to avoid giving if possible before we've taped down the quid pro quos”.¹⁵⁷ The following chapters will summarize the impact of the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel from 1962 onwards.

¹⁵⁶ Feldman, “Myer Feldman Oral History Interview,” 425.

¹⁵⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy*, May 16, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d250> (accessed November 21, 2014).

Chapter 5. The Israeli Arms Spiral

Just as it usually did, the live CBS broadcast of the long-running American television soap opera *As the World Turns* came on the air at 1:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on Friday, November 22, 1963. Approximately ten minutes into the program, as characters Will and Nancy Hughes were discussing plans for their upcoming Thanksgiving holiday, a CBS news bulletin flashed across the screen. Soon thereafter, anchorman Walter Cronkite delivered devastating news to the American public. Pausing to remove his glasses, Cronkite faced the camera and reported the following, “From Dallas, Texas, the flash, apparently official: President Kennedy died at 1 p.m. Central Standard Time, 2 o'clock Eastern Standard Time, some 38 minutes ago”. After a brief pause, Cronkite continued, “Vice President Johnson has left the hospital in Dallas, but we do not know to where he has proceeded; presumably he will be taking the oath of office shortly and become the 36th President of the United States”.¹⁵⁸ Just as Cronkite had stated, Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as President aboard Air Force One, stationed at Dallas Love Field in Texas. Beside him stood the late President’s wife, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, still wearing her bloodstained double-breasted pink Chanel suit.

The assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy ushered in a new era in terms of American foreign policy towards the Middle East. From the time he entered office until Richard Nixon succeeded him on January 20, 1969, Lyndon Johnson was open about his support for the Jewish state and commitment to Israeli security. Johnson made his position clear from the very beginning of his Presidency. At the reception following John F. Kennedy’s funeral on November 25, 1963, he reassured Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Golda Meir, of his commitment. “The

¹⁵⁸ “JFK assassination: Cronkite informs a shocked nation,” CBS News, accessed December 13, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/jfk-assassination-cronkite-informs-a-shocked-nation/>.

United States will continue its warm friendship with Israel,” Johnson assured her, “Israel can count on this”.¹⁵⁹ Throughout his five years in the White House, Johnson provided the Israeli Defense Force with M-48 Patton tanks, A-4 Skyhawk aircraft and, in 1968, much desired F-4 Phantom jets.

This new era of arms sales, however, found its roots in Kennedy’s foreign policy, which had laid the foundation for the strategic military relationship between Jerusalem and Washington and, more broadly, the American-Israeli special relationship. It was the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles under John F. Kennedy that broke the U.S. arms embargo to Israel and set in motion the process that resulted in the United States replacing France as Israel’s principal arms supplier. The sale of the Hawk, however, had even farther-reaching ramifications. The sale not only opened the floodgates for further American arms sales to Israel, but also accelerated the arms spiral in the Near East. This chapter examines how the U.S. decision to sell Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel worked to accelerate future arms negotiations between Washington and Jerusalem. This will include an analysis of the immediate aftermath of the Hawk sale before Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas and the continued implications of this sale under Johnson. Ultimately, while the United States was keen to control the Middle East arms race, the Hawk sale set a precedent that tied Jerusalem to Washington, and vice versa. The next chapter will outline how the sale of the Hawk accelerated the arms spiral in the wider Middle East.

Weeks after formally agreeing to provide the Israeli Defense Force with Hawk anti-aircraft missiles in the summer of 1962, the Department of State sent a circular telegram to a number of posts including Amman, Beirut, Damascus, Cairo, Jidda, and Jerusalem, to name a few. According to the telegram, the Soviet agreement to supply missiles to Iraq and the United Arab Republic (UAR) had forced the United States to respond favorably to Israel’s request for

¹⁵⁹ Douglas Little, “The Making of a Special Relationship,” 573.

missiles. The United States aimed to make it clear that, as far as they were concerned, the Hawk sale by no means constituted a change in policy.¹⁶⁰ The State Department stressed, as it had in

the past, that it remained deeply concerned with preventing arms proliferation in the region.¹⁶¹

Behind closed doors, however, State Department officials recognized the significance of the Hawk sale. Writing to Carl Kaysen, Kennedy's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, in late September of 1962, National Security Council Senior Staff member Bob Komer acknowledged the Hawk sale as a clear "pro-Israeli" move on behalf of the Administration.¹⁶²

President Kennedy confirmed the tie between the United States and Israel when he met with Golda Meir at the winter White House in Palm Beach, Florida, on December 27, 1962.

Comparing the American-Israeli "special relationship" to the close ties between the United States and the United Kingdom, the President assured Meir that "in case of an invasion the United States would come to the support of Israel".¹⁶³ Regardless of the image that the United States hoped to project to the Arab world, the Kennedy administration was clearly no longer a neutral player in the Middle East.

Israeli officials too recognized the shift in the U.S.-Israel relationship in the aftermath of the Hawk sale. As far as Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was concerned, the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles had proved that the arms embargo could be broken and opened the door for future negotiations. Knowing this, Israel launched a renewed relentless campaign for further security guarantees only weeks after obtaining the Hawk. By early October 1962, Israeli

¹⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Circular Telegram From the Department of State to Certain Posts*, September 14, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d40> (accessed December 13, 2014).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kaysen)*, September 22, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d52> (accessed December 13, 2014).

¹⁶³ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Conversation with Israel Foreign Minister Meir*, December 27, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d121> (accessed December 5, 2014).

diplomats began suggesting the purchase of Douglas AIR 2-Genie air-to-air rockets and Lockheed F-104 Starfighter aircraft. These requests did not come as a surprise to U.S. officials. According to Phillips Talbot, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, increased Israeli arms requests were exactly what “we had feared” in the aftermath of the Hawk sale.¹⁶⁴

Israeli requests for the rockets and aircraft continued into the spring of 1963. According to Israel, new weapons acquisitions by surrounding Arab countries necessitated additional guarantees to the Jewish state.¹⁶⁵ Writing to Kennedy in April of that year, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion stated, “I fully appreciate your decision to release the Hawk missiles to Israel, but I regret to say that this defensive weapon alone cannot serve as a deterrent to our neighbors”.¹⁶⁶ According to Ben-Gurion, the Arabs were “preparing weapons whose offensive potential cannot be reduced by the Hawk”.¹⁶⁷ Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser’s renewed endeavor to re-establish the United Arab Republic with Syria and Iraq further fueled Israeli requests.¹⁶⁸

By this time, the Department of State was itself becoming increasingly concerned with the long-range security situation in the Near East.¹⁶⁹ According to a letter sent from Phillips Talbot to John S. Badeau, the Ambassador to the United Arab Republic, President Kennedy was once again concerned that developments in the Middle East might prompt a nervous Israel to

¹⁶⁴ Warren Bass, *Support any friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the making of the U.S.-Israel alliance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 182.

¹⁶⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Brubeck) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)*, April 27, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d220> (accessed December 5, 2014).

¹⁶⁶ Bass, *Support any friend*, 183.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Letter From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to the Ambassador to the United Arab Republic (Badeau)*, May 20, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d253> (accessed December 13, 2014).

turn towards nuclear weapons.¹⁷⁰ Desperately trying to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, President Kennedy felt that it was “important to give serious consideration to Israel's strong desire for a more specific security guarantee”.¹⁷¹

The crux of Israel’s renewed campaign for arms, however, was tanks. Seeking to take advantage of the favorable conditions created by the Hawk sale, Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir spoke with Phillips Talbot on September 30, 1963 in New York City. According to Meir, Israel was anxious to acquire two particular types of weapons, tanks and ground-to-air missiles. Just as how the Jewish State had previously argued for Hawk anti-aircraft missiles, Meir maintained, “Israel must avoid allowing the UAR to gain definite military superiority”.¹⁷² It was agreed that Israeli and American officials would meet in mid-November to discuss Israel’s security concerns. On November 14, 1963, Israeli Defense Force General Yitzhak Rabin and Minister of the Israeli Embassy in the United States, Mordechai Gazit met with Robert W. Komer in Washington. According to Rabin, Israeli tanks had a limited fuel capacity of five hours whereas Soviet T-54 tanks, which had been supplied to Egypt, had a 15-hour range.¹⁷³ Komer agreed that Israeli tanks were inferior to their Egyptian counterparts. He feared, however, that if the Jewish State purchased tanks, this would only push the UAR to acquire more Soviet models.¹⁷⁴ Rabin concluded that while Israel was deeply appreciative of private assurances, they couldn’t rely solely on this. David Ben-Gurion’s successor, the third Prime Minister of Israel, Levi Eshkol, had further defined Israel’s needs in a letter to Kennedy in early November.

¹⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Letter From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to the Ambassador to the United Arab Republic (Badeau)*, May 20, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d253> (accessed December 13, 2014).

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Secretary’s Delegation to the Eighteenth Session of the United Nations General Assembly*, September 30, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d331> (accessed December 13, 2014).

¹⁷³ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum for the Record*, November 14, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d360> (accessed December 13, 2014).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

According to Eshkol, Israel's needs were threefold. First, more missiles were needed to meet the Egyptian missile threat. Second, Israel desperately needed tanks. Third, the Jewish state needed some means of countering Egyptian naval strength.¹⁷⁵ Simply put, the Jewish state wanted a more formal alliance with the United States.¹⁷⁶ The Hawk was a start, but Israel wanted more.

Despite initial claims that the Hawk sale did not constitute a shift in American foreign policy, it had become increasingly clear by the end of the Kennedy administration that this was no longer the case. By the time John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas at the end of the November 1963 and Lyndon B. Johnson assumed his role as the 36th President of the United States, the gates for further negotiations were open. Johnson, for his part, picked up where Kennedy had left off. "You have lost a great friend," Johnson said to an Israeli diplomat shortly after Kennedy's assassination, "but you have found a better one".¹⁷⁷

A memorandum of conversation sent early in the New Year, titled *Israeli Requests for Military Assistance*, confirms that by early 1964 the Johnson administration was becoming increasingly sympathetic to Israeli requests. According to Israeli Ambassador Avraham Harman, Israel was now totally out-classed in tanks by the United Arab Republic. Nasser had obtained Soviet T-54 tanks and Stalin 3s. In contrast, Israel only had outdated French AMX tanks, British Centurions and old Sherman tanks. Considering this defense gap, Israel sought to obtain two hundred M-48 tanks from the United States to replace Israel's old tanks.¹⁷⁸ In response, Secretary of State Dean Rusk informed the Israeli delegation that the United States was very sympathetic

¹⁷⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum for Record: Israeli Arms Needs*, January 10, 1964, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d7> (accessed December 5, 2014).

¹⁷⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum for the Record*, November 14, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d360> (accessed December 13, 2014).

¹⁷⁷ Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship," 573.

¹⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Israeli Request for Military Assistance*, January 3, 1964, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d3> (accessed December 5, 2014).

to Israeli security concerns and that the department would take a serious look at Israeli requests for tanks.¹⁷⁹

By January 15, 1964, the State Department had concluded that while the Israeli Defense Force required neither missiles nor naval weapons, the United States could see a genuine need for tanks.¹⁸⁰ Just as the U.S. had attempted prior to the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles in 1962, the Department again tried to steer Israel towards the European market before offering American arms.¹⁸¹ A memorandum dated April 30, 1964 suggested that perhaps Israel should look to Great Britain, France, or West Germany as potential sources.¹⁸² While Israel chose to look towards West Germany, officials ultimately believed that the United States would fill the gap if needed. According to a memorandum dated March 1964, “Israel had seen the Hawk sale as U.S. acceptance of the principle that we would not allow an arms imbalance to develop”.¹⁸³ Simply put, the 1962 Hawk sale had set a precedent whereby Israel expected American security guarantees.

Indeed, this is exactly what happened. Israel signed an agreement with West Germany in 1965 to purchase 150 M48A2 tanks. Due to strong Arab opposition, however, West Germany failed to fulfill its obligation and was unable to deliver a majority of these tanks. The United States responded with an offer to supply Israel with M-48 Patton tanks.¹⁸⁴ According to a telegram sent from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel on March 8, 1965, the sale

¹⁷⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Israeli Request for Military Assistance*, January 3, 1964, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d3> (accessed December 5, 2014).

¹⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation Between the Israeli Ambassador (Harman) and the President's Deputy Special Counsel (Feldman)*, January 15, 1964, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d8> (accessed December 12, 2014).

¹⁸¹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum for the Record: Standing Group Meeting on Israeli Requests for U.S. Tanks*, April 30, 1964, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d49> (accessed December 12, 2014).

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum for Record: Israeli Arms Needs*, March 5, 1964, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d26> (accessed December 5, 2014).

¹⁸⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel*, March 8, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d182> (accessed December 13, 2014).

could be justified on two accounts. First and foremost, 110 tanks were to be offered to make up the shortfall in German deliveries.¹⁸⁵ Next, an additional 100 tanks were to be offered to Israel to offset tank sales to Jordan by the United States.¹⁸⁶ In total, Johnson agreed to provide Israel with 210 tanks, conversion kits and ammunition for a total of \$42 million.¹⁸⁷ These deliveries would be made to the Jewish state over a period of four months beginning in January of 1966.¹⁸⁸

Notably, a later telegram sent from the Department of State further confirmed that the United States felt obligated to provide Israel with weapons as a means to “correct imbalances and thereby to preserve peace”.¹⁸⁹ This was especially important in light of heavy Soviet arms sales to the U.A.R. and fears that a desperate Israel might turn towards nuclear weapons.¹⁹⁰ According to the State Department, the U.S. government “sold Hawks to alleviate Israeli apprehensions of U.A.R. bombers. For the same reason the U.S. Government now would be prepared to sell Israel limited types and quantities of arms required for their defense”.¹⁹¹ Whether it was the initial intention or not, the 1962 Hawk sale had clearly opened the door to further arms sales.

In the years following Johnson’s decision to provide M-48 Patton tanks to Israel, the United States followed up with the sale of Douglas A-4 Skyhawk aircraft. Just as was the case in the aftermath of the Hawk sale, Israel hoped to strike while the iron was hot and link the tank sale to an aircraft sale. “Our Israeli friends are typically pressing us to enrich the secret arms deal as much as possible” and “since we’ve done even better than they originally expected on tanks,

¹⁸⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara*, May 6, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d211> (accessed December 12, 2014).

¹⁸⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel*, March 8, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d182> (accessed December 13, 2014).

¹⁸⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson*, July 29, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d230> (accessed December 12, 2014).

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel*, June 5, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d222> (accessed December 12, 2014).

¹⁸⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Arab Republic*, March 18, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d193> (accessed December 5, 2014).

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

they're now zeroing in on aircraft", wrote Robert W. Komer.¹⁹² Much like the road leading to the acquisition of tanks, however, the State Department maintained in the summer of 1965 that they would only sell aircraft to the Jewish State under the circumstance that Israel could not obtain suitable aircraft from a Western European supplier.¹⁹³ "We'll stall for a while and try to shift them to Europe," Komer noted in a later letter to Johnson, "we can always concede in the end".¹⁹⁴ And concede they did. Only a year after the agreement to supply Israel with M-48 Patton tanks, the United States agreed to provide Israel with 48 Skyhawk bombers, formally replacing France as Israel's principal aircraft supplier.¹⁹⁵ In 1968, Johnson also formally agreed to provide Israel with much desired F-4 Phantom Jets.

By the end of the Johnson administration, the United States government could no longer declare that they were a neutral player in the Middle East arms business.¹⁹⁶ The Hawk sale under President Kennedy had set a precedent for future arms sales and had begun a process where one sale led to the next. With the Hawk in hand, Israeli officials immediately launched a campaign for additional security guarantees in the form of tanks. Once secured, the Jewish state turned towards aircraft. This phenomenon, however, was by no means limited to Israel. The sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles in 1962 also accelerated the arms spiral in the wider Middle East, most notably in the United Arab Republic. Chapter six will address the impact of the Hawk sale in the arms escalation in Nasser's Egypt.

¹⁹² U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson*, June 16, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d224> (accessed December 12, 2014).

¹⁹³ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel*, June 5, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d222> (accessed December 12, 2014).

¹⁹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson*, July 29, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d230> (accessed December 12, 2014).

¹⁹⁵ Warren Bass, *Support any friend*, 185.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Chapter 6. The Middle East Arms Spiral

On the morning of September 17, 1962, John S. Badeau, opened his copy of the popular Egyptian daily newspaper *Al-Ahram* to find a most unwelcome editorial cartoon. Clearly heralding the end of the United States arms embargo towards Israel, the cartoon depicted Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion receiving an armful of weapons from America's Uncle Sam. Swiftly putting down his newspaper, Badeau cabled Washington to inform the Kennedy Administration of the impending media backlash.¹⁹⁷ Naturally, the United States had hoped to keep the details of the 1962 Hawk missile sale confidential. At the same time, the Administration understood that doing so would be virtually impossible.¹⁹⁸ Recognizing that it would be better for Egyptian officials to learn of the Hawk deal first-hand, Phillips Talbot called a meeting with the Egyptian Ambassador to the United States, Mustafa Kamel, on September 26, 1962.¹⁹⁹ As anticipated, the Hawk sale became public knowledge the next day as the information leaked and the BBC, the *Associated Press*, and the *New York Times* all ran the Hawk story.²⁰⁰

The onslaught from the Arab world began on September 27, 1962. "It is impossible for Arabs to accept any excuses justifying the U.S.'s gift of rockets to Israel," read the Amman-based newspaper *Falastin*.²⁰¹ Echoing this statement, the *Beirut al-Massa* noted that the United States "did not hesitate to supply American rockets to the Jews which will kill Arabs".²⁰² While Jordan and Lebanon were certainly critical of the Hawk sale, it was Nasser's Egypt that was most critical of the agreement with Israel. According to the state-owned Egyptian daily

¹⁹⁷ Warren Bass, *Support any friend*, 117.

¹⁹⁸ Maurice M. Labelle, "Empire by Association: The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the United States in Lebanese Imaginations," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 23 (2012): 48, accessed January 15, 2015, DOI: 10.1080/09592296.2012.651961.

¹⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Sale of Missiles to Israel*, September 26, 1962, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d55> (accessed January 15, 2015).

²⁰⁰ Bass, *Support any friend*, 178.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁰² Labelle, "Empire by Association," 49.

newspaper, *Al-Akhbar*, “every bullet given to Israel is meant to kill an Arab, every rocket, thousands of Arabs”.²⁰³ Going further, *Al-Akhbar* asked, “is it neutrality which makes the U.S. refuse to supply the U.A.R. with one single gun while supplying Israel with rockets?”²⁰⁴

Keenly aware of the fragile balance of power in the Middle East, the United States had anticipated a strong Arab media backlash in response to the sale of the Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel. The media response, while certainly being an inconvenience, was however expected to fizzle out. As such, it was but a temporary hurdle for the Department of State. The real fear resulting from the sale of the Hawk anti-aircraft missile to Israel was a potential Middle East arms spiral. To be sure, the Hawk had been offered to Israel partially in an attempt to restore the arms imbalance created in the Middle East by significant Soviet arms sales to Egypt, including the sale of Tupolev Tu-16 twin-engine jet bombers and Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-21 jet fighter aircraft.²⁰⁵ Despite this, the Kennedy administration aimed to ensure that this sale would not be countered by another competing Soviet sale to Egypt.

In the spring following the announcement of the Hawk sale, President Kennedy thus wrote a letter to Egyptian President Nasser to address the subject. “I am quite concerned over the risks—and costs—inherent in the arms spiral in the Middle East,” Kennedy wrote, “[and] I can assure you that we intend to maintain a balanced perspective on this problem”.²⁰⁶ President Kennedy followed up the following month with a second letter to President Nasser. “The US is urgently studying what we might do to help avoid serious trouble in the area”, Kennedy reminded the Egyptian leader “in this effort we are keeping Arab views and interests very much

²⁰³ Bass, *Support any friend*, 179.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Labelle, “Empire by Association,” 49.

²⁰⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State*, May 15, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d215> (accessed January 12, 2015).

in mind”.²⁰⁷ Much to the Kennedy administration’s chagrin, Nasser responded less than favorably to Kennedy’s plea for arms control. According to a memorandum sent from William H. Brubeck to McGeorge Bundy, on June 11, 1963, Nasser’s letter of response conveyed that the “U.A.R. armaments program [could be] justified as necessary to redress arms balance”.²⁰⁸ In other words, instead of committing to an arms limitation agreement, as Kennedy had hoped, the State Department understood that Nasser felt that renewed U.A.R. arms purchases from the U.S.S.R. were necessary to remedy the imbalance created by Israel’s acquisition of the Hawk anti-aircraft missiles. Already nervous about the fact that the Israelis were well ahead of Egypt in the nuclear field, Nasser was not prepared to allow Ben-Gurion to surpass him in terms of missile capacity.²⁰⁹ The United States, of course, understood and feared that this would likely lead to increased Egyptian dependence on the Soviet Union.²¹⁰ Regardless of American attempts to halt an arms race between the Jewish State and the United Arab Republic, the Hawk sale had in fact launched the Middle East arms spiral that continued throughout the decade.

Notably, the Soviet Union had a long history of arms sales to the U.A.R and had seen the Middle East as an important area of interest since the 1950’s.²¹¹ Close ties with Syria, Yemen and Egypt were first established mid-decade and the first arms transaction between the U.S.S.R. and Egypt were conducted in 1955 whereby the Soviet Union provided Egypt with \$256 million

²⁰⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Arab Republic*, May 27, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d257> (accessed January 12, 2015).

²⁰⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Brubeck) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)*, June 11, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d266> (accessed January 11, 2015).

²⁰⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy*, May 31, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d260> (accessed January 12, 2015).

²¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum by the Working Group on Near East Arms Limitation*, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d261> (accessed January 11, 2015).

²¹¹ Andrew J. Pierre, *The Global Politics of Arms Sales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 138.

worth of arms, using Czechoslovakia as an intermediary.²¹² The first direct agreement between Moscow and Cairo took place the following year, in 1956.²¹³ While the Soviet buildup of Arab arms continued through the remainder of the decade, Soviet sales to Egypt began to escalate sharply in the years following the 1962 Hawk missiles sale to Israel.

A number of memoranda that circulated through the State Department in the years following the Hawk sale, and into the Johnson Administration, point to the growing Arab arms buildup and the resulting need to redress the arms imbalance. In a memorandum for the record sent on January 10, 1964, Israeli Ambassador Avraham Harman explained the basis for increased Israeli security requirements, including the need for tanks and surface-to-air missiles “to meet the growing U.A.R. missile threat”.²¹⁴ While the Israelis had once hoped that the Middle East arms spiral could be avoided, Egyptian President Nasser’s unwillingness to halt the arms race had become increasingly clear, especially considering the evidence suggesting “growing U.A.R. missile stockpiles”.²¹⁵ McGeorge Bundy, responded that the Administration recognized that the “imbalance between Israeli and Arab armor posed a ‘real’ problem,” and the Department was thus actively looking into the issue.²¹⁶ By the early spring of 1964, the situation had not improved. According to Abba Eban, the United Arab Republic continued to introduce new levels of weaponry into the region, escalating the arms race. As such, “the upward spiral of the Near

²¹² Central Intelligence Agency, *Intelligence Memorandum: Major Directions in Soviet Military Assistance*, May 1969, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000496069.pdf (accessed January 15, 2015), 7.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum for Record: Israeli Arms Needs*, January 10, 1964, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d7> (accessed January 11, 2015).

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

East arms race seemed impossible to stop”.²¹⁷ President Johnson echoed this view on May 25, 1964, noting that the “spiral was both dangerous and expensive to those involved”.²¹⁸

Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser weighed in on the arms imbalance on June 8 1964, during a farewell interview in Cairo with U.S. Ambassador John S. Badeau. According to Nasser, the Egyptian purchase of Surface-to-Surface Missiles (SSM) from the Soviet Union had been considered necessary to counterbalance Israel’s Hawk installations.²¹⁹ According to Badeau, President Nasser “admitted [that an] arms escalation was under way, saying every time Israel acquired more sophisticated aircraft, he had been forced to do same or to seek some compensatory weapon”.²²⁰ Simply put, Egypt felt the need to match any Israeli arms acquisitions.

By the early winter of 1965, Department of State officials realized that the growing Soviet arms sales to Egypt would soon tilt the Near East arms balance against Israel.²²¹ Recognizing this, and in an attempt to not get ‘caught in the middle’, President Johnson sent a letter to President Nasser in mid-March of 1965. Like Kennedy, who had unsuccessfully appealed to Egypt in 1963 to adopt a policy of containment, Johnson now urged Nasser to do the same.²²² To be sure, the State Department was well aware that compliance was unlikely. Reviewing the talking points that had to be discussed with Nasser, Dean Rusk noted that if both the Israelis and the Arabs were unwilling to arrange some sort of dénouement in the arms race

²¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Israel and the Near East*, March 4, 1964, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d23> (accessed January 11, 2015).

²¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: U.S.-U.A.R. Relations*, May 25, 1964, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d60> (accessed January 8, 2015).

²¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State*, June 8, 1964, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d71> (accessed January 10, 2015).

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson*, February 6, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d138> (accessed January 15, 2015).

²²² U.S. Department of State, *Letter From President Johnson to President Nasser*, March 18, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d192> (accessed January 15, 2015).

then the “international community has no alternative to selling arms to correct imbalances and thereby to preserve peace”.²²³ According to Rusk, the U.S. had sold the Hawk anti-aircraft missiles partially in an attempt to reassure Israel vis-à-vis newly acquired Egyptian bombers. For the same reason, the United States would now be prepared to provide Israel with “limited types and quantities of arms required for their defense”.²²⁴ Nearing the end of the telegram, Rusk noted that he hoped the U.A.R. and the U.S. could agree on some way to halt the Middle East arms spiral. He concluded his telegram by saying “[the] U.S. need to sell arms to Israel of course will be governed by what [the] Arabs do”.²²⁵ Notably, it was later revealed in a memorandum sent from Walt Rostow, to President Johnson on April 7, 1967, that the March 1965 decision to sell A-4 Skyhawk aircraft to Israel was intended to complete a round of escalations.²²⁶

President Nasser replied to President Johnson’s letter on May 12, 1965. While Nasser did not directly deny Johnson’s request, it was clear from his reply that the U.A.R was disappointed by the increased U.S. arms sales to Israel. “It is regrettable indeed, that a number of Western countries in general, undertook the responsibility of arming Israeli aggression through dangerous transactions,” noted Nasser in his response.²²⁷ Considering Nasser’s reluctance to halt the arms spiral, the Department of State turned to his suppliers, the Soviet Union.

On February 17, 1966, Ambassador-at-Large, Llewellyn E. Thompson, met with the U.S.S.R. Ambassador to the U.S., Anatoly F. Dobrynin. At this meeting Thompson brought up the issue of the arms spiral in the Middle East and inquired as to whether or not it might be possible to “hold down the arms race” in the region through some kind of agreement between the

²²³ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Arab Republic*, March 18, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d193> (accessed January 11, 2015).

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson*, April 7, 1967, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d401> (accessed January 12, 2015).

²²⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram From the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State*, May 15, 1965, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d215> (accessed January 12, 2015).

U.S. and the U.S.S.R. that would limit arms sales to all parties.²²⁸ The two met once again the following month to discuss the situation. Just as Nasser had been unwilling to compromise, Dobrynin indicated that the U.S.S.R. considered the arms buildup in the Near East to be a complex issue. According to Thompson, “the tenor of his remarks was to the effect that they [the Soviets] had little interest”.²²⁹ State Department officials considered approaching Soviet officials once more in the spring of 1967. Much like before, U.S. attempts to halt the arms spiral were unsuccessful.

Ultimately, the American decision to sell armaments to Israel, which included the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles, contributed to a dangerous race whereby Israel and Egypt fought to tilt the scales in their favor. According to a Central Intelligence Agency report from the spring of 1969, published under President Nixon’s administration, the United Arab Republic had received the largest share, nearly a third, of Soviet military aid in the years between 1957 and 1969.²³⁰ Since the first arms agreement in 1955, the U.S.S.R provided Egypt with \$1.3 billion in arms aid, accounting for more than all U.S. military assistance supplied to the entire Middle East between 1956 and 1968.²³¹ During these years, Soviet military aid to the U.A.R. accounted for nearly 8 percent of the total production of Soviet weapons.²³² In the end, the 1962 sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel not only opened the floodgates for future American arms sales to Israel, but also to increased Soviet sales to Egypt.

²²⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation: Arab/Israeli Arms Supply*, February 17, 1966, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v18/d272> (accessed January 12, 2015).

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, *Intelligence Memorandum: Major Directions in Soviet Military Assistance*, May 1969, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000496069.pdf (accessed January 15, 2015), 7.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Pierre, *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*, 139-140.

Conclusion

As a president who is perhaps best remembered for his advancement of civil rights, John F. Kennedy's Middle East policy is easily overlooked amidst the cold war turbulence of the early 1960s. President Kennedy's move to break the arms embargo to Israel in the late summer of 1962 represented a significant shift in American foreign policy towards the Near East. The decision to provide Israel with Hawk anti-aircraft missiles was the result of a number of factors including the discovery of the Nuclear Research Center at Dimona in the Negev Desert, the tightening relationship between President John F. Kennedy and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, and the American agenda to resettle Palestinian refugees. The combination of these factors led the Department of State to conclude that providing Hawk missiles to Israel was in the best interest of the United States.

The discovery of the Negev Nuclear Research Center at Dimona in December of 1960 was the first of three factors that motivated the sale. From the very beginning of his presidency, Kennedy was deeply disturbed by the fact that Israel was on the brink of developing nuclear weapons. While the United States feared the proliferation of nuclear technology, U.S. officials also understood that Israel's desire to develop nuclear weapons was motivated by the fact that Israel was both surrounded by hostile neighbors and lacked any sort of security guarantee from the United States. Ultimately, the Department of State concluded that providing Israel with an official security guarantee might be necessary to prevent nuclear proliferation. Hawk anti-aircraft missiles were thus provided to the Jewish state as a security guarantee in exchange for Israeli compensations regarding Dimona. Such compensation included an immediate halt to the Israeli nuclear program and the agreement to allow U.S. officials to regularly visit and inspect Dimona to ensure that the terms of the agreement were being met.

The tightening relationship between John F. Kennedy and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser was the next factor that emerged in the early 1960's. Fearing the spread of communism in the Middle East, President Kennedy aimed to establish closer ties with the United Arab Republic and wanted to provide President Nasser with an alternative to relying on the Soviet Union for aid. America's opportunity to strengthen ties with the U.A.R. came in 1962, when Egypt faced a severe economic crisis and was unable to produce enough grain to feed the growing Egyptian population. Hoping to lead Nasser to a more neutral position, the United States agreed to provide Egypt with financial assistance under Title I of the Public Law 480-Aid program, also known as Food for Peace. While U.S. officials felt that providing Egypt with aid was in the American interest, they also recognized that doing so would leave Israel increasingly nervous considering that Egypt could now redirect financial resources towards the purchase of arms. The Hawk anti-aircraft missile was thus in part provided to Israel as a compensatory security guarantee in light of increased U.S. aid to Egypt.

The final factor that played a significant role in the decision to break the arms embargo to Israel was the American agenda to resettle Palestinian refugees. From the beginning of his presidency, John F. Kennedy aspired to resettle the estimated 700,000 Palestinian refugees who were forced to flee their homes during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. For Kennedy, resolving the refugee crisis would also be another way to win favor with Egypt's Nasser. To be sure, Israel was opposed to the Johnson Plan to resettle Palestinian refugees from the very beginning. Despite this, U.S. officials concluded that perhaps Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion would be more receptive to the idea with the Hawk missile already in hand. Following this logic, Hawk anti-aircraft missiles were sold to Israel in 1962 without establishing any binding pre-conditions related to the refugee crisis. By providing the Hawk, the United States hoped that

Ben-Gurion would adhere to the principle of expected reciprocity and be willing to accept an increased number of refugees.

While a solution to the Palestinian refugee crisis did not result from the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel, the ensuing Israeli arms buildup was a clear outcome of the sale. Simply put, the 1962 Hawk sale ushered in a new era of arms sales to Israel and set a precedent whereby the Jewish State came to expect American security guarantees. The Hawk sale proved to Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion that the U.S. arms embargo could be broken, and opened the floodgates for future negotiations. Only weeks after obtaining the Hawk, Israel launched a relentless campaign for new weapons, arguing that the Israeli Defense Force was completely outclassed by the United Arab Republic. By 1964, the new Johnson administration was becoming increasingly sympathetic to Israeli requests and when West Germany proved unable to fulfill its agreement to provide Israel with 150 M48A2 tanks due to strong Arab opposition, the United States stepped in and provided M-48 Patton tanks to Israel. In the following years, A-4 Skyhawk aircraft and F-4 Phantom jets were also sold to Israel. By the end of Johnson's administration, the United States was clearly no longer a neutral player in the Middle East and this shift in policy had found its roots in the 1962 Hawk sale.

The sale of the Hawk missile contributed significantly to the Israeli arms buildup in the mid-1960's. However, this arms spiral was not limited to the Jewish state. The real concern following the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel was how to control the arms spiral in Egypt. In the immediate aftermath of the sale, U.S. officials approached the U.A.R. in an attempt to convince President Nasser to agree to an arms limitations agreement. From the very beginning, however, Nasser was unreceptive to the idea and felt a need to redress the arms imbalance created by the Hawk sale to Israel. Simply put, Egypt felt the need to match any

Israeli arms acquisition with Soviet weapon purchases. This pattern of arms buildup continued throughout the decade. The US decision to sell the Hawk missile to Israel thus contributed to both the growing arms race in the Middle East and opened the floodgates for future U.S. arms sales to Israel and Soviet sales to Egypt.

Ultimately, when considering both the motivating factors behind the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles and the ramifications that followed, the significance of the Yad Kennedy memorial, highlighted in the opening paragraph of this paper, becomes increasingly clear. Through his decision to break the arms embargo to Israel in August of 1962, President Kennedy not only opened the floodgates for future U.S. arm sales to Israel and parallel Soviet arms sales to Egypt, he also laid the foundation for the alliance between Tel-Aviv and Washington that continues to this day.

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