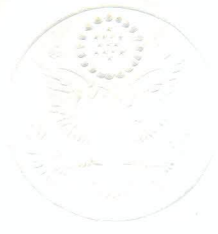


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EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Tel Aviv,

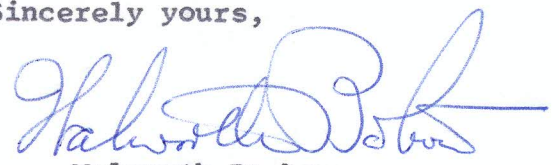
October 3, 1963.

SECRET

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

I enclose the text of a letter which I have been instructed to deliver to you from President Kennedy.

Sincerely yours,

  
Walworth Barbour

Enclosure:

Letter from  
President Kennedy.

His Excellency

Mr. Levi Eshkol,

Prime Minister of Israel.

CLASSIFIED

SECRET



SECRET

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

We have been giving the most careful thought in the last few months to former Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's letter of May 12. I know you are as concerned as he has been with the problems of Israel's security of which he wrote so tellingly. So I wish to put before you our full thinking on a matter of such great importance to us as well as you.

It seems to me, from my reading of the letter, that your concern is not so much the security of Israel at this moment as the danger that confronts Israel from the persistence of belligerence on its borders and the possibility that, after the Arab States have increased their military potential, there might be an incident that would lead to a war threatening the very existence of Israel.

The attitude of the United States to the creation of Israel has always been one of sympathy and understanding for your aspiration to re-establish your ancient homeland.

Our policies

His Excellency

Mr. Levi Eshkol,

Prime Minister of Israel.

SECRET

Our policies have given concrete proof of our determination to see a prosperous Israel securely established in the Near East and accepted by her immediate neighbors. We shall continue this policy.

When Mr. Ben-Gurion wrote we were all disturbed over the situation in Jordan. We took several measures to avoid any untoward happening, which I believe contributed to the happy result. I mention these because I see them as relevant to the central problem discussed in Mr. Ben-Gurion's letter. Our quick reaction forces in the Mediterranean---far stronger than needed to protect the independence of any friendly Near Eastern State---were brought promptly into operational range. These forces backed up our vigorous private counsels to the parties potentially involved. In addition, I felt it advisable to restate publicly on May 8 our position in the event of aggression, putting as clearly as I could our fundamental attitudes and intentions. My purpose was of course to underline the reassurances in this respect which I had given to Mrs. Meir the previous December and included in my letter to Mr. Ben Gurion on May 5.

Another factor giving rise to Mr. Ben-Gurion's proposal was his acute concern over the trend toward a hostile form  
of Arab

of Arab unity exemplified by the April 17 Tripartite Arab Declaration in Cairo. I think that we would both agree that this prospect has receded, though of course it may rise again.

In any event we have looked at Mr. Ben-Gurion's proposal less in this short term context than in the light of the basic question as to whether more explicit security arrangements would actually enhance Israel's security sufficiently to outweigh the disadvantages we see attending such a move. I doubt that they would and I would like to share my thinking with you.

First, as to the credibility of our intentions, we believe that there is no Near Eastern leader today, whatever his attitude toward your nation, who does not fully understand the import of our public, national commitment as I reaffirmed it on May 8.

Second, our capabilities to carry out this commitment are, and will remain, more than adequate to deter or halt swiftly any aggression against Israel or its neighbors. In fact, after receiving Mr. Ben-Gurion's letter, we thoroughly reassessed our plans and forces-in-being; as a result, I am fully satisfied that we can back up our assurances.

Equally

Equally important is our assessment that Israel's own military capabilities continue to provide it with a substantial deterrent advantage. Mr. Ben-Gurion's letters and the statements of your own military leaders indicate that you share this estimate.

Thus it is our judgment that the existing informal arrangements meet Israel's needs and give clear warning to the Arabs; to go further at this juncture would entail certain positive disadvantages to you as well as to us. Our policies and programs in regard to the Arab States have resulted in improved relationships which permit us to talk frankly and realistically to them and enable us to exert some leverage on their actions. While I do not wish to overestimate this influence, I am convinced that we can best advance your interests as well as ours by maintaining such relationships and our resultant ability to talk with both sides. A bilateral security relationship such as Mr. Ben-Gurion suggested would, I fear, have a distinct contrary effect.

This adverse effect would be magnified if, as is all too likely, the Arabs responded by seeking compensatory reassurances from the USSR. The USSR's recent veto of action on Israel's complaint in the UN Security Council shows

shows that it continues to see its interest in backing the Arabs against Israel. It is not so much Arab hostility as the hostility plus Soviet arms support which creates the threat to your security. So we hesitate to encourage the Arabs to seek security arrangements with Moscow, or at least to seek even more arms than they are now getting, lest it give the USSR a dangerous opportunity to fish in troubled waters. This would serve neither your interests nor our own.

In sum, a careful and sympathetic weighing of Israel's as well as United States interests leads me to conclude that the policies we are now following in the Near East remain those best calculated to serve these interests, enhance stability in the region, and minimize Soviet exploitation of divisive trends. There is no doubt in Arab minds as to how we would respond to unprovoked aggression by them. To formalize our know<sup>n</sup> intentions and commitments---to go further into special security arrangements with Israel at this point---would contribute little to deterrence, while in fact provoking a hostile Arab reaction which might have consequences adverse to Israel's security. In fact, any such move would be widely viewed as an

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as an abrupt departure from established United States policy, arousing suspicion and concern both in the Near East and the world at large.

Nonetheless, I know you need no reassurance as to the constant and special United States concern for the security and independence of Israel. We have the will and ability to carry out our stated determination to preserve it. We recognize, moreover, that there may yet develop a serious increase in the Arab military threat. Should time and events prove this to be the case, I can assure you that, as in the case of the Hawk missile, we will most carefully consider with you the best ways and means of coping with it. In any case, we always remain happy to discuss with you and your people any aspect of this matter, which is of such deep mutual concern.

Sincerely,

JOHN F. KENNEDY

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