

From Dallas to Gaza: Was JFK's Assassination Instrumental in Strengthening Zionist Israel?

If he had lived and won a second term, the Israeli Palestinian conflict would have evolved differently. Possibly the path toward Israeli apartheid and genocide in Gaza could have been avoided.

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President John F. Kennedy was assassinated 60 years ago. If he had lived and won a second term, the Israeli Palestinian conflict would have evolved differently. Possibly the path toward Israeli apartheid and genocide in Gaza could have been avoided.

In his short time in office, Kennedy changed US foreign policy in significant ways. As documented in the book "JFK and the Unspeakable: Why he died and why it still matters", JFK resisted the CIA and military industrial complex in the policies he set regarding the Third World and Soviet Union. The Vietnam War, assassination of Indonesia's President Sukarno, and continued hostility to Cuba and the Soviet Union would not have happened had Kennedy lived and won a second term.

Less well known, Kennedy's policies also challenged and opposed the military and political ambitions of Zionist Israel. At the time, Israel had only existed for thirteen years. It was still evolving and the course was not totally set. There was significant international resolve to find a compromise solution regarding Palestinian refugees from the 1948 Nakba. When Israel attacked Egypt and seized the Sinai peninsula in 1956, the Eisenhower administration demanded Israel withdraw from the captured territory. They complied.

At this time, in the early 1960's, prominent Jewish voices criticized the racism and discrimination of the Israeli government. Israelis like Martin Buber assailed Ben-Gurion and [noted](#) that "At the inception of the state, complete equality with the Jewish citizens was promised to the Arab population." Many influential Israelis realized their long term security and well-being depended on finding a just settlement with the indigenous Palestinian population.

In the United States, the Jewish community was divided and many were anti-Zionist. The [American Council for Judaism](#) was influential and anti-nationalist. The racist and militaristic character of Israel was not yet set in stone. Nor was American Jewish support for Israel. When Menachim Begin came to the United States in 1948 he was [denounced](#) by prominent Jewish leaders including Albert Einstein. They said Begin, who later became Israeli Prime Minister, was a “terrorist” who preached “an admixture of ultra-nationalism, religious mysticism and racial superiority.” Many American Jews had mixed feelings and did not identify with Israel. Others supported Israel but on the basis of there being peace with the indigenous Palestinians.

There are four key areas where the Kennedy policy was substantially different from what followed after his death.

Kennedy Was Not Biased in Favor of Israel

The Kennedy administration sought good relations with both Israel and the Arab nations. Kennedy aimed to extend US influence throughout the Middle East, including with nations friendly with the Soviet Union and at odds with NATO partners.

JFK personally supported Arab and African nationalism. As a senator in 1957, he criticized the Eisenhower administration for supporting and sending weapons to France in their war against the Algerian independence movement. In a [9,000 word presentation](#) to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he criticized “western imperialism” and called for the US to support Algerian independence. Algerian President Ben Bella, who France had tried to assassinate and considered far too radical by many in NATO, was given a huge and impressive [welcome](#) to the White House.

Kennedy changed the previous frosty relations with the United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria) led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. For the first time, the US approved loans to them. Kennedy wrote respectful letters to the Arab presidents before he welcomed Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion to Washington. The Arab leaders could see the difference and responded with appreciation. Those who claim there was no difference with Kennedy ignore the fact that Egypt’s Nasser, Algeria’s Ben Bella and other nationalist leaders saw a big difference.

In 1960, when Kennedy was campaigning for the presidency, he [spoke](#) at the Zionists of America Convention. He made complimentary remarks about Israel but also expressed the need for friendship with all the people of the Middle East. He said the US should “*act promptly and decisively against any nation in the Middle East which attacks its neighbor*” and “*The Middle East needs water, not war; tractors, not tanks; bread, not bombs.*”

Kennedy frankly told the Zionists, “*I cannot believe that Israel has any real desire to remain indefinitely a garrison state surrounded by fear and hate.*” By maintaining objectivity and neutrality on the Israeli Arab conflict, Kennedy wanted to steer the Jewish Zionists away from the racist, militaristic and ultra-nationalistic impulses which have led to where we are today.

Kennedy Wanted the Zionist Lobby to Follow the Rules

The second difference in Kennedy’s policy is regarding Zionist lobbying on behalf of Israel. Under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), organizations that promote or lobby on

behalf of a foreign government are required to register and account for their finances and activities. Under Attorney General Robert Kennedy, the Department of Justice (DOJ) instructed the American Zionist Council (AZC) to register as agents of a foreign country. AZC is the parent organization of the American Israel Public Affairs Council (AIPAC).

As documented in detail [here](#), on 21 November 1962, the Assistant Attorney General wrote to them “the receipt of such funds from the American sections of the Jewish Agency for Israel constitutes the (American Zionist) Council an agent of a foreign principal.... the Council’s registration is requested.”

The emergence of Israeli political influence was also scrutinized in the Senate. Under [Senator William Fulbright](#), the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held [hearings](#) in May and August 1963. They revealed that tax free donations to the United Jewish Appeal, supposedly for humanitarian relief in Israel, were being channeled back to the US where the money was used for lobbying and Israeli public relations.

Attorneys for AZC stalled for time. On August 16, 1963, a [DOJ analyst](#) reviewed the case and concluded, “Department should insist on the immediate registration of the American Zionist Council under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.”

On October 11 the DOJ [demanded](#) that AZC register and “Department expects a response from you within 72 hours.”

On October 17, a [DOJ memorandum](#) reports that attorneys for AZC pleaded for not being required to register as foreign agents. They offered to provide the required financial disclosures but that registering as a foreign agent “would be so publicized by the American Council on Judaism that it would eventually destroy the Zionist movement.” As indicated in this discussion, political zionism was not yet dominant in the American Jewish community and was actively opposed by the [American Council on Judaism](#) and other Jewish groups.

Kennedy Supported Palestinian Rights

A third difference is regarding Palestinian rights. Although he was only 44 when he became president, Kennedy had more international experience than most US presidents. In 1939 he spent two weeks in Palestine. In a lengthy [letter](#) to his father, he described the situation and difficulties. He wrote,

“The sympathy of the people on the spot seems to be with the Arabs. This is not only because the Jews have had, at least some of their leaders, an unfortunately arrogant, uncompromising attitude, but they feel that after all, the country has been Arabic for the last few hundred years Palestine was hardly Britain’s to give away.”

In comments that are still true, Kennedy remarks how the Jewish residents are divided between “*strongly Orthodox Jewish group, unwilling to make any compromise*” and a “*liberal Jewish element composed of the younger group who fear these reactionaries*”. His analysis is sympathetic to both Jewish and Arab peoples and addresses the difficulty but necessity to find a compromise solution.

In the early 1960’s, the US State Department was not locked in to a biased acceptance or approval of Israeli policies. The US supported [UN Resolution 194](#) resolving (in paragraph 11) that “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should

be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.” This has become known as the “right of return”.

On November 21, 1963, the day before Kennedy’s assassination, the NY Times has two [news stories](#) which exemplify the discord between Washington and Tel Aviv. A report from the United Nations is titled “Israel Dissents as U.N. Group Backs U.S. on Arab Refugees”. It begins,

“A United States resolution calling for continued efforts to resolve the predicament of the Palestinian Arab refugees was approved tonight 83 to 1... Israel cast the single negative vote....The issue centers on a 1948 resolution whose key section, paragraph 11, concerns the future of the Arabs who were displaced from their homes by the Palestine conflict. They have been living in the lands bordering Israel The revised United States text calls on the Palestine Conciliation Commission to ‘continue its efforts for the implementation of Paragraph 11’.”

The second NYT story is titled “U.S. Stand Angers Israel”. It reports from Jerusalem that “Premier Levi Eshkol expressed extreme distaste today for the United States’ position in the Palestine refugee debate....Israel’s anger was conveyed ‘in the strongest terms’ to the US Ambassador The Israeli Government is upset about the American resolution before the UN Political Committee and by American maneuvers over the issue.” Israel was angered and objecting because the Kennedy administration was trying to resolve the Palestinian refugee situation including the right of return.

Kennedy Tried to Stop the Israeli Nuclear Weapons Program

The fourth and biggest contention between Kennedy and the Israeli leadership was regarding their developing nuclear weapons. This issue was kept so secret that crucial documents and letters have only been released in recent years.

President Kennedy was a strong advocate for stopping nuclear proliferation. After the 1962 Cuba missile crisis, he realized how easy it would be to intentionally or accidentally trigger a catastrophic nuclear war. If nuclear weapons were allowed to spread to more countries, the risks of global catastrophe would be all the greater. It was also predicted that if Israel acquired nuclear weapons capability, they would become more aggressive and less likely to reach a compromise agreement regarding Palestinian refugees.

When intelligence indicated that Israel might be trying to build a nuclear weapon at Dimona in 1962, Kennedy was determined to find out if this was true, and if so to stop it. This caused an intense diplomatic confrontation between JFK and Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. The proof of this has recently been revealed in the [exchange of letters](#) between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and his successor Levi Eshkol. They are all labeled “Top Secret” or “Eyes Only”.

It is important to see the sequence and some details to understand how intense this showdown was. These communications are all from 1963. (Note to reader: skip ahead to the next section if you become tired of the detail in the following exchanges.)

In March the US State Department [instructed](#) the US Ambassador to inform the government of Israel (GOI) that for “compelling reasons” the “USG seeks GOI assent to semi-annual

repeat semi-annual visits to Dimona, perhaps May and November, with full access to all parts and instruments in the facility, by qualified US scientists.”

On April 19 the State Department instructed the US Ambassador to Israel to “press” for an “affirmative reply” to the earlier request for semi-annual inspections of Dimona.

On April 26, Israeli PM Ben Gurion [replied](#) to President Kennedy. He evaded the issue of nuclear facility inspections and instead expressed his concern regarding a recent proclamation from Egypt, Syria and Iraq. He compared Egyptian President Nasser to Germany’s Hitler.

On May 4 JFK [responded](#) to Ben Gurion’s concerns and underscored the US commitment to Israel and peace in the Middle East. He told the Israeli leader he is much less worried about an “early Arab attack” than the “successful development of advanced offensive systems”.

On May 8, a [Special National Intelligence Estimate](#) concluded, “Israel intends at least to put itself in a position to be able to produce a limited number of weapons” and that “unless deterred by outside pressure [the Israelis] will attempt to produce a weapon sometime in the next several years.” The analysis predicted that if Israelis had the bomb it would “encourage them to be bolder in their use of the conventional resources both diplomatic and military in their confrontation with the Arabs.”

On May 10, US State Department sent an [“Eyes Only Ambassador” telegram](#) to the US Ambassador to Israel. The ambassador was instructed to remind the Israeli leadership that they have previously agreed to the bi-annual inspections. The telegram also says Israeli concerns about Arab development of a nuclear bomb “are not valid” because there is nothing comparable to the “advanced Israeli program.”

The tensions between the Kennedy administration and Tel Aviv caused the Israel lobby to escalate pressure on the White House. This is revealed in a May 11 [TOP SECRET State Department memo](#) regarding “White House Concern with Arab-Israeli Matters”. It begins,

“In recent weeks, as you are aware, it has become increasingly clear that the White House is under steadily mounting domestic political pressure to adopt a foreign policy in the Near East more consonant with Israeli desires. The Israelis are determined to use the period between now and the 1964 Presidential election to secure a closer, more public security relationship with the United States, notably through a public security guarantee and a cooler, more antagonistic relationship between the United States and the UAR [United Arab Republic].”

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ASSISTANT SECRETARY

CATEGORY "A"TOP SECRET

19 Completely de-sensitized

Transferred to O/FADRC

by S/S-T date 9-2-23

May 11, 1963

To : The Secretary

Through: S/S MA

6994

From : NEA - James P. Grant MA

Subject: White House Concern with Arab-Israeli Matters

In recent weeks, as you are aware, it has become increasingly clear that the White House is under steadily mounting domestic political pressure to adopt a foreign policy in the Near East more consonant with Israeli desires. The Israelis are determined to use the period between now and the 1964 Presidential elections to secure a closer, more public security relationship with the United States, notably through a public security guarantee and a cooler, more antagonistic relationship between the United States and the UAR. The President is apparently desirous of seeking some form of accommodation to domestic pressures flowing from this Israeli desire without seriously impairing our other interests in the area. At best this would be extremely difficult to accomplish.

At the same time, the President is concerned with the arms escalation in the Near East. He is particularly concerned with the apparent Israeli intent to develop a nuclear weapon capability within the next few years. Any arms limitation accord involving both Israel and the UAR will be possible only if we retain the substance of the new relationship developed by this Administration with the UAR.

Also noteworthy, Mike Feldman increasingly is the primary White House staff influence on United States policy with respect to Israel and Arab-Israeli issues. All outgoing cables and actions dealing with Israel and Arab-Israeli matters, and which could have a domestic political impact, must now be cleared with the White House.

Stemming from your meeting with the President on the UAR Wednesday afternoon, May 8, we are now charged with the urgent preparation of (a) a Presidential letter to Nasser which takes a first step in establishing a dialogue with Nasser on the twin problems of area security and arms limitation; and, (b) a study of the various types

of security

[Source](#)

This is a highly interesting memo showing Israeli influence in US foreign policy and electoral politics. It further shows Kennedy's effort to mitigate this influence while standing firm on the goal to stop nuclear proliferation.

On May 12, 1963 Ben Gurion wrote another [long letter](#) to President Kennedy. Again evading the US request, Ben Gurion gives a distorted history including the claim that Palestinian refugees left Palestine "at the demand of Arab leaders". He again compares Nasser to Hitler and suggests the danger of a new Holocaust.

He says, "Mr, President, my people have the right to exist ... and this existence is in danger."

BLUE
SECRET (Attachment)
EYES ONLY

7140

May 14, 1963

TO: Mr. McGeorge Bundy
The White House

FROM: Mr. William H. Brubeck
Executive Secretary *W. H. Brubeck*

I am attaching for your information
two copies of a letter from Prime Minister
Ben Gurion of Israel to the President
dated May 12, 1963.

The signed original and recommendations
regarding reply will follow.

Attachment:

Copies # 5 & 6

SECRET (Attachment)

[Source](#)

On May 19, Kennedy [responded](#) to Ben Gurion emphasizing the importance he placed on not allowing the spread of nuclear weapons.

"We are concerned with the disturbing effects on world stability which would accompany the development of a nuclear weapons capability by Israel."

Kennedy underscores the "deep commitment to the security of Israel" but says the commitment and support "would be seriously jeopardized" if the US is unable to obtain reliable information about "Israel's efforts in the nuclear field."

On May 27, Ben Gurion [responded](#) to Kennedy saying that the nuclear reactor at Dimona "will be devoted exclusively to peaceful purposes". He counters Kennedy's request for bi-

annual visits starting in June by suggesting annual visits “such as have already taken place” starting at the end of the year. The condition is significant because the previous “visit” to Dimona was restricted in time and space.



The Shimon Peres Negev Nuclear Research Center as viewed from a Corona satellite in the late 1960s
(Public Domain)

On June 15, Kennedy [wrote](#) to Ben Gurion after he had received a scientific evaluation of the minimum requirements for a nuclear site inspection. After welcoming Ben Gurion's assurances that Dimona will only be devoted to peaceful purposes, Kennedy issued a polite ultimatum. "If Israel's purposes are to be clear to world beyond reasonable doubt, I believe the schedule which would best serve our common purpose would be a visit early this summer, another visit in June 1964, thereafter at intervals of six months." He specifies that the "visit" must include access to all areas and "sufficient time be allotted for thorough examination."

On June 16, the US Embassy in Israel [reported](#) that Ben Gurion resigned as Israel's Prime Minister. This was a huge surprise; the explanation was that it was for "personal reasons". It is likely that Ben-Gurion knew the contents of the forthcoming letter from Washington (received at the embassy the day before). The impact of his resignation was to stall for time. US Ambassador Barbour suggested waiting until the "cabinet problem is worked out" before sending JFK's near ultimatum to the next Prime Minister.

Kennedy did not wait long. On July 4, he [wrote](#) to new Israeli Prime Minister Levy Eshkol. After congratulating Eshkol on becoming new Prime Minister, he goes straight to the point "concerning American visits to Israel's nuclear facility at Dimona." Kennedy says, "I regret

having to add to your burdens to soon after your assumption of office, but ..." He then goes on to request inspections as was requested in the letter to Ben-Gurion and that "support of Israel could be seriously jeopardized" if this is not done.

On July 17, Eshkol [wrote](#) to Kennedy that he needed to study the issue more before responding to Kennedy's request for visits to Dimona. US Ambassador Barbour added that Eshkol verbally conveyed that he was "surprised" at Kennedy's statement that US commitment to Israel might be jeopardized. Indicating Israeli defiance, Eshkol told the US Ambassador "Israel would do what it had to do for its national security and to safeguard its sovereign rights."

On August 19, Eshkol [wrote](#) to Kennedy re-iterating the "peaceful purpose" of Dimona and ignoring the request for a summer inspection. He proposed the inspection take place "toward the end of 1963".

On August 26, Kennedy [wrote](#) to Eshkol accepting the visit at year end but emphasizing it needs to be done "when the reactor's core is being loaded and before internal radiation hazards have developed." Kennedy set these conditions because they were essential for determining whether the facility could be used for developing a nuclear weapon.

On September 16, State Department prepared a [Memorandum of Conversation](#) with a counselor from the British Embassy. There was joint concern but agreement that Dimona would be visited and inspected "prior to the activation of the reactor."

After the Assassination of JFK on November 22

After Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) became president, US mideast policy changed significantly. From the start, LBJ [told](#) an Israeli diplomat, "You have lost a very great friend. But you have found a better one." The Israeli publication Haaretz says, "Historians generally regard Johnson as the president most uniformly friendly to Israel." The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs [writes](#) "Lyndon Johnson Was First to Align U.S. Policy with Israel's Policies" and "Up to Johnson's presidency, no administration had been as completely pro-Israel and anti-Arab as his."

On the crucial issue of Dimona inspection, the Israelis ignored JFK's condition and the reactor went critical on December 26. When the inspection occurred three weeks later, they could not inspect the areas that had been irradiated. A handwritten comment on the [report](#) says, "We were supposed to see this first!" We do not know what would have happened if JFK had been in the White House but given the intensity of his effort, and deep convictions regarding the dangers of nuclear proliferation, it would not have been ignored as it was under LBJ.

Under LBJ, relations with Egypt deteriorated. The US stopped providing direct assistance [loans and grants](#) to Egypt. The US became increasingly antagonistic to President Nasser, as desired by the Israel lobby.

US support for a resolution to the Palestinian refugee issue decreased and then stopped.

The Department of Justice efforts to require the American Zionist Council to register as foreign agents became increasingly weak until they were dropped under LBJ's new Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach. The sequence of exchanges includes:

On December 11, 1963, the AZC attorney [wrote](#) to the DOJ saying, "Our client is not prepared to register as an agent of a foreign government." Instead, he proposed to provide "voluntarily" the required financial information.

In January and February 1964, there were more exchange between AZC and the DOJ. AZC expressed concern because the American Council on Judaism publicly said that AZC was acting as "propaganda agents for the state of Israel and that the Jewish Agency was being used as a conduit for funds for the Zionist organization in the United States."

In summer 1964 Nicholas Katzenbach becomes Attorney General. Negotiations continued. DOJ staff noted that AZC was "stalling" and not providing acceptable information despite the increasingly special and favorable treatment. In spring of 1965 the DOJ [accepted](#) that AZC was NOT required to register as foreign agent. Their financial information was kept in a [unique expandable folder](#). In November 1967 the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) applied for a federal tax exemption. The US Treasury Department [granted it](#), backdated to 1953.

Increasingly Aggressive and Uncompromising Zionist Israel

The successful development of nuclear weapons added to Israel's aggressive actions and unwillingness to resolve the Palestinian refugee crisis.

With intelligence information provided by Washington, Israel made a surprise attack on Egypt, Syria and Jordan in June 1967. The "Six Day war" was a crucial turning point in middle east history. Israel quickly defeated the unprepared combined armies. In the West, public perception of Israel changed overnight. The mythology of Israeli military (and general) superiority was created. Among the American Jewish population, doubts and concerns about Israel evaporated and support skyrocketed.

Israeli leaders arrogance and deceit is exemplified by the attack on the [USS Liberty](#) during the Six Day War. The communications navy vessel was monitoring the air waves in the eastern Mediterranean when it was attacked by Israeli aircraft and boats. Thirty four US sailors were killed and 172 injured. Amazingly, the ship managed to stay afloat. The plan was evidently to sink the ship, blame it on Egypt and consolidate US support and hostility to Egypt and the Soviet Union.

Lyndon Johnson over-ruled the calls for help from the vessel, saying "I will not have my ally embarrassed."

The deadly incident was covered up for decades.

We do not know for sure what might have happened had JFK not been assassinated. It is possible that Israel would have been stopped from acquiring the bomb. Without that, they may not have had the audacity to launch the 1967 attacks on their neighbors, seizing the Golan, West Bank and Gaza Strip. If the Zionist lobby had been required to register as foreign agents, their influence would have been moderated. Perhaps Israel could have found a reasonable accommodation with Palestinians in one or two states.

Instead, Israel hardened into an [apartheid regime](#) committing increasingly outrageous massacres. As Kennedy warned in 1960, Israel has become a "garrison state" surrounded by "hate and fear". The assassination of John F Kennedy insured Zionist control of Israel, suffering for Palestinians and permanent instability.

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