Lyndon Johnsons Effect Of AMerican Foriegn Policy Towards Isreal Essay, Research Paper

The following is a discussion of American foreign policy towards Israel, and the Middle East. In it I will show that Lyndon Johnson changed the regional position and opinion of the United Stated by adapting a pro Israeli stance, categorized by excusing many unadvised forceful actions taken by Israel. It will be shown how Johnson?s response to the outbreak of the 1967 War was the major factor in the change. These changes took the first steps in developing the close friendship between America and Israel.

Other factors will be discussed. The cold war had a major effect on policy decisions. This will be shown through a historical account of his predecessor?s policies in their dealings with the region. I will show that American some presidents had pro Israeli feelings, but aimed at staying neutral, and keeping the broadness of American influence in the Middle East.

In all dealings, American presidents tried to appease both sides, and keep the peace. It was not until Lyndon Johnson came to power that policy took such pro Israeli turn. His predecessor John F Kennedy set the stage, but it?s roots lie in the Truman presidency, when Israel was not yet a nation. The analysis next leads to Eisenhower, his stance during the Suez Canal Crisis, gained America a good standing amongst Israeli?s and Arabs. The foundations for the 1967 war are built on this crisis.

Harry Truman looked at the issue through Humanitarian eyes, as did his predecessor, Franklin Roosevelt. The two both truly felt sorry for what had had happened to the Jews and wanted to see some reparations made.

These two men had their cabinets, state department and foreign affairs to consider before making a public stance on their Jewish feelings. Truman had a very bureaucratic, and anti Semitic state department to deal with. He called them the striped pants boys. These boys saw no reason to stress the urgent creation of a Jewish state, and were in no hurry to empty the overflowing displaced persons camps. Truman?s opinion was that the state department?s only concern was future American Arab relations, and not the fate of the shattered people. (Lenczowski page 26)

This was also the world opinion. World War II had just ended. Most of the European powers were bankrupt. The Arabs were also a consideration; they controlled the oil a resource the western powers relied on. These nations were not eager to see a Jewish state created in their neighborhood.

Harry Truman took pro Jewish actions anyway. In a communication to English Prime Minster Winston Churchill on July 24, 1945 he requested that he lift the existing immigration restrictions of Jews to the then state of Palestine.

Truman’s policy led to harsh criticism. It was said that he urged action in Palestine but was not willing to take responsibility for its enforcement. American motives came into question as well. One year later Foreign Secretary Earnest Beavin at a conference addressing the British labor party in Bournmouth on June 12 1946, was quoted as saying American policy makers want to ensure immigration to Palestine ? Because they did not want too many of them on New York.? (Lenczowski page 26) This was not the time to give full American support to the Jews.

Instead an Anglo American ?blue ribbon? committee was formed to look into possible solutions to the problem. Upon Truman’s acceptance members appointed, and began working. The committee in April of 1946 concluded, and made their recommendations, in ?The Grady Morrision report?. It recommended the continuation of the British mandate, the immediate immigration of 100,000 Jews to Palestine, and immediate repudiation of the land transfer restrictions. The next step was the creation of an Anglo-American committee to implement the sanctions put forth by the original committee. (Lenczowski page 23)

The result was the Grady Morrison report, it called for the formation of a federalized Arab Jewish state, as well as required Jewish Arab consent on numbers of Jewish refugees aloud to immigrate. This proposal was disappointing to the Zionists, and was not accepted by Truman, and the committee was a failure. (Lenczowski page 24)

On two occasions before and after reading the report of committee Truman called upon England to allow 100,000 Jews to immigrate Palestine. On 10\4\46, Truman made his feelings clear, when he communicated to Clement Atlee, British prime minister. Truman was adherent to aid the Zionists and in fact would not give them his full support, but was eager to find a solution to the problem. The issue became the prime issue of international diplomacy. (Lenczowski page 24)

After the failure and non-implementation of their recommendations, Truman began to publicly show how pro Jewish he was. Harry Truman was a believer in the idea of self determination, the right of a nation under the control of another nation to regain it?s freedom, and decide it?s own fate, it does not give the mother land the right to decide the future of the conquered people. (Lenczowski page 25)

Truman stated ? The Balfour declaration, promising the Jews the opportunity to re-establish a homeland in Palestine had always seemed to me to go hand in hand with the noble policies of Woodrow Wilson, especially the principals of self determination. Note when Truman used the term re-establish, he was referring to the Jewish nation located there 2 millennia ago. (Lenczowski page 26)

The opinion of the state department and military, were more bureaucratic and not humanitarian. Truman referring to them as striped pants boys stated that they were more concerned with the future Arab American relations and western interests in the Middle East, stating that the formation of the state would jeopardize them. The Arabs were in control of the oil, a resource needed by America and all the other western powers.

Truman and Roosevelt in dealing with the issue said they would consult the Arabs before making a public decision. Members of both their staffs said that their promises to consult the Arabs were in constant with their Zionist sympathies. (Lenczowski 26)

Truman heard his advisors opinions, reviewed both state department recommendations, that were against the formation of the state. At this time, his desk was flooded with letters from American Zionists who had recommendations of their own. After considering all the facts, he made his decision to instruct the American delegation to the UN, to vote for Israel.

The decision of Harry Truman, to support Israel, set the stage for complicated times for future American presidents. In making his decision he, he only set the stage for American Israeli relation, rather that shape them. He did not take an official American stance. In fact when the 1948 war broke out, only one nation would sell the newly formed Israel weapons, not America, but Czecelslovakia.

When Eisenhower came into power, relations with Israel, and the entire Middle East, became geared towards keeping the Soviet Union out. His policies did not favor Israel, but were carefully crafted not to put them at a disadvantage. Eisenhower viewed the Middle East as the most important strategic asset on the globe, and was determined to keep Russia out. His policies took more of an appeasing role. He aimed at keeping everyone happy, and to be fair to all sides. (Snider, page 170)

American Israeli relations during the Eisenhower years were not in any way favorable, but not disadvantageous. With interests of Soviet exclusion, and wants to keep the Arabs happy, Eisenhower, as warned by his aids was reluctant to take a stand on the Arab Israeli dispute. He took a very neutral response. He tried more to keep the peace rather that ignite another world conflict. For example when Israel asked for arms, Eisenhower promised only to provide them if needed, and stated that he would order an American ship loaded with arms to stay in the Mediterranean, and dispatch the arms to any Middle East whose security was threatened. (Lesch page 51)

During Eisenhower?s presidency there were three issues in the Middle East that put him in a compromising position. The Suez Canal crisis that led to the second Arab Israeli War was at the forefront. There were more issues at hand than just the war and foreign relations. The Civil war in Lebanon, and a revolution in Iraq. On all of these issues, there was the potential for an American Soviet confrontation.

The Issue directly involving Israel, the Suez War shows, how un favorable, and neutral Eisenhower?s policy toward Israel was. He had no problem, suspending aid, and laying down harsh sanctions if Israel did not listen to the recommendations.

During Eisenhower?s term the cold war came to Egypt, first in the form of a competition over the funding of The Aswan Dam, and second over arms sales. In the early 1950?s an Egyptian plan to build a dam capable of powering the Nile Delta and the surrounding desert areas was made. It was at first to be funded by the U.S., Britain, and the World Bank. The plan was coming to fruition until Egyptian president, began to search for other sources of funding. He was beginning to be more drawn politically to the Soviet Union, and was leaning towards accepting a Soviet offer for the dam. The U.S. was aware of Nassr?s motives and in 1956 withdrew the offer. (Lenczwski page 49)

The Soviet Union never made an offer for funding the dam, but in 1955 did sign an arms pact with the Egyptians, ending the western monopoly of arms supply to the Middle East. It was also at this time that Nasser nationalized the British/ French owned Suez Canal. The Suez Canal, according to the Constantinople Convention of 1888, stated that the cannel was within Egyptian borders, and under the jurisdiction of there security and defense, but it was supposed to be an international waterway, with free navigation in times of peace and war.

The British and French hinted the use of force. Against Eisenhower’s advice, they planed to mobilize and invade. Eisenhower warned against this. But in October of 1956 the English and French joined by Israeli planed a secret offensive. The result was the Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip, and Sinai Peninsula with French and British support. (Lenczowski, page 50)

Eisenhower?s disagreed with the action. He opposed the use of force. He feared that any wrong move would fully open the door to the Soviets. As a response Eisenhower suspended all us military and some economic aid to Israel. He also brought forth in the United Nations Security Council, an immediate cease-fire, and sending in a 6000 man UN peace keeping force. By December of 1956, all French and British troops left the canal. Israel on the other hand withdrew from the Sinai, but refused to leave the Gaza strip. (Lenczowski page 48)

In response Eisenhower made a televised speech where he instructed Israel to leave the areas. Privately he contemplated suspending all private aid to Israel from the United States. As a result on march 1 1957, Israel withdrew all troops from the areas.

These moves were hardly pro Israel. As events lead on, a pro Israeli step was taken. (Lenczowski page 49)

Israeli ships were always denied access to the Egyptian controlled Gulf of Aqaba, and Strait of Tiran. These waterways lead to the Red Sea. Israel was always denied access to these passages. During the conflict, the IDF captured the land around the gulf. After the situation was defused the waterway came under the control of the UN, Israel wanted free use of the passage. In response on March 7th Eisenhower declared the gulf an international waterway, and ordered an American tanker chartered by Israel to proceed through the gulf, to Israeli territory. (Lenczowski, page 50)

In the coming years, American foreign policy towards the Middle East, would take a step in a very different direction. The Kennedy presidency started the change in both American/ Israeli and American Arab relations. Arabs and Israelis viewed John F Kennedy as a friend. (Snider, page 170) Both sides saw his genuine interests in a peaceful solution to the conflict, and saw that he considered the interests of each group.

The Kennedy \ Israeli relations were much more favorable and modern. His policy?s set the stage for Johnson?s very pro Israeli policies. During his term as president he pledged his support to Israel 19 times, if there were to be an Arab attack. In 1961 Kennedy sent his aid Meyer Feldman on a secret mission to Israel, to pledge the support of America?s sixth fleet, and to agree to give Israel skyhawk missiles. (Lenczowski, page 71) Kennedy like his predecessors was careful not to ignite tensions with the Arabs, and to keep on good relations with them.

Johnson had a harder job defining policy with Israel than Kennedy did. During his term of office two major crisis ignited in the Middle East, that as a result weakened the American position of influence in the mid east. The Cyprus crisis and the Arab Israeli were of 1967. It was during his presidency that modern Israeli foreign relations are shaped. When Johnson came into power, the regional opinion of America was based on dealings with Eisenhower and Kennedy.

After the Suez Crisis, the U.S. was seen by both sides as a fair nation to deal with. This fairness was carried through the Kennedy presidency, but quickly changed. When Johnson came into power. By the time Johnson left office the Arab opinion of America changed form being a respected and helpful nation, to becoming distrusted and hated.

?I have always had a deep feeling of sympathy for Israel and his people, gallantly building and defending a modern nation against great odds and against the tragic back round of the Jewish experience?-Lyndon Johnson. (Lenczowski, page 105) This passage taken from his memories, stands as a backdrop, and shows that he was sympathetic to the Jewish people. But does not excuse the moves he made in dealing with the Israeli?s.

The Johnson years marked a major change in the American position in the Middle East. His policies were geared towards keeping his and his party?s domestic opinion in good standing. While in office Johnson blessed America by gaining a reputation in the Middle East as a nation whose loyalties lied first with Israel. Johnson gave high tech weapons to Israel, during a regional arms embargo. He covered up a vicious and unwarranted Israeli attack on an American naval vessel, where 34 were killed, and 171 wounded. Also on many occasions excused the unadvised use of force.

The Johnson Administration saw many opportunities in Israel. The change begins with one of the first foreign policy steps taken by Johnson. In 1964, to receive the Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol. The two developed an intimate relationship, different than previous relations between American Presidents, and Israeli Prime Ministers. (Lenczowski, page 105)

The Next change comes in the form of aid. Originally America was supplying Israel with a moderate supply of defensive arms, with a 12.9 million-dollar military aid. In 1963 this figure rose with the supply of sky hawk missiles to 44.2 million. In 1966, Israel?s military aid changed highly sophisticated arms for offensive purposes, with a $90 million aid. By 1968 Israel was receiving 995.3 million. This more than doubled the cumulative amount of aid from all the years Israel existed. (Lesch, page 180) These actions were common in the Johnson years.

?The offensive arms included A-1 Skyhawk attack aircraft, the F-4 Phantom jet fighters, and the Patton M-48 tanks, highly lethal weapons at the time, superior to anything the soviets could offer their clients.? (Lenczowski page 106)

In the mid 1960?s, Israel planed to divert a portion of the Jordan River to serve their water needs. When the Arab frontline states learned of the Israeli plan, that responded by beginning their own diversion plan. Israel was not pleased by this action, and retaliated. America was opposed to the use of force. This did not stop the Israelis form directing shellfire at the men working on the project. At no time did any member of the Johnson administration attempt to stop the use of force. (Lenczowski, page 106)

The real change in the American position came with the outbreak of the 1967 war. During the course of the war two major changes took place. The regional opinion of the United States changed. As a result of the war, the Soviet position was strengthened. Six Arab nations, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Algeria, and Sudan broke diplomatic relations with the United States. These breaks were caused by assertions made by Nasser that American planes participated in the attacks on Egypt. (Lenczowski, page 112)

The second change is between America and Israel. ? The Americans were giving us support such as we have never known before.? (Lenczowski page 113) Once the fighting started ? Johnson shower a clear and lasting bias in favor of Israel and a disregard for the public commitments he and his administration had made to oppose form any quarter.? Richard Parker. (Lesch, page 195) After the war Johnson adapted a policy of ?unquestioning support for Israel? ?The Israeli victory created new conditions that the U. S. government should move to exploit.? Walt Rostow (Lesch 195) an analysis of the war will show how far Johnson took American support of Israel.

On May 16, 1967, Nasser demanded that the UN peacekeeping force leave Egyptian Israeli borders. This is the same force stationed there after the Suez Canal crisis. On May 17, UN secretary general U Thant ordered the entire force to leave all Egyptian territory. Placing control of the disputed waterways back in Egyptian hands. (Lenczowski, page 107)

May 22, 1967, Nasser proclaimed a blockade of Israeli shipping through the Strait of Tiran. Nasser did not physically blockade the strait and had no intention of waging war. Israel did not see the move in the same light as the Egyptians, and took it as an act of aggression. Their response was first to demand the right to use the waterway. Many of Israel?s military leaders saw this move as an opportunity to launch an attack against Egypt, and a general mobilization order was given.

At this time the Israeli cabinet became divided. Some wanted to launch a full attack, while others looked at how an attack would effect Israel?s international standing.

Before launching an attack, Prime Minister Eshkol wanted to gain the support of the United Stated and It?s western Allies. Foreign Minister Abba Eban was dispatched to Paris, London, and Washington.

When Eban and Johnson met they discussed Arab intentions, and how such a move would effect Israel. Cabinet members to exercise caution and restraint first advised him. While secretly Johnson favored the use of force acknowledging America?s commitment to keep the strait of Tiran open. Johnson proposed to organize an international naval fleet, to patrol through the strait, and challenge Nasser?s blockade. (Lenczowski, page 108)

Johnson felt that Israel should not be the first to fire. He urged Eban to give him time to implement his plans and see their effect. ?Israel will not be alone unless it decides to go alone?(Lenczowski, page 108) Johnson also portrayed his thoughts directly to Prime Minister Eshkol.

These talks had no impact on Israel. On June 5, 1967, Israel launched an unadvised attack on Egypt, crippling them in a matter of days. Soon after they attacked Jordan and Syria. In six days, the Israel amounted victorious, taking from Jordan, the Entire West Bank, from Syria, the Golan Heights and from Egypt, The Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula. Israel also nearly destroyed all of the Arab air forces. The UN response was to arrange a cease-fire, and a return of all forces to the original borders.

This was not at all the victory expected by the United States. The U.S expressed no anger. Only more support was given. Johnson instructed the American delegation the United Nations to support Israel.

The American delegation opposed the proposal for the return to the original borders, and sided with the Israelis in their refusal. Johnson, felt that going back to the agreements of 1957 were not conducive to peace. ?Peace can not be obtained by going back to the fragile and often violated armistice?(Lenczowski, page 110) He felt that Israel should only give back conquered territories in exchange for peace.

In this conflict the Johnson never once condemned the Israeli decision to launch a un advised offensive. Although Johnson opposed the Israeli attack, he never did much to persuade them not to. This is where the conflict comes into play. It is here at the outbreak of the war that Johnson showed his true colors.

After advising Eban against firing the first shot, Johnson made a rather peculiar move. May 23, 1967 Johnson authorized the secret delivery of arms to Israel. (Lenczowski, page 110) Publicly he had imposed an arms embargo on any weapons destined for the Middle East. The weapons arrived one day before Israel launched their offensive.

During the course of the 1967 war Israel made a sudden crazy move. On June 8th the IDF attacked the USS Liberty an American navel ship stationed off the coast of Israel. The mission of this vessel was to intercept radio transmissions made by Israel, and the other nations involved in the war. Israel attacked by air and by sea. When lifeboats were lowered, gunshots were fired at the crewmembers entering them. (Lenczowski page 110)

Obviously know one was meant to survive. During the course, calls for help were sent. The aircraft carrier America dispatched planes. On Washington?s these planes were recalled before ever reaching the Liberty. The attack took the lives of 34 men, and wounded 171. (Lenczowski, page 110)

Johnson?s response to the attack was obscene. All survivors were ordered not to discuss the attack with anyone. A navel court of inquiry was formed and conducted in a way as to earn the name cover-up. Israel claimed the attack was an error, even though an American flag was flying on the ship’s deck. Johnson accepted the Israeli explanation ?We learned that the ship had been attacked in error by Israeli gunboats and planes. Ten men of the liberty crew were killed and 100 were wounded. This heart breaking episode grieved the Israeli?s deeply, as it did us?-Lyndon Johnson (Lenczowski, page 111)

Not only did Johnson excuse the Israeli slaying of American sailors, but also he downplayed the incident, publicly lowering the number of casualties. (Lenczowski, page 111) It seems Johnson was more interested in avoiding a conflict with the Soviet Union, then punishing Israel. Russia had a long history of relations with both Syria and Egypt; both nations used Russian supplied arms. The Liberty was stationed off the shore of Egypt collecting radio transmissions. Had the Russian?s been aware of this, they surly would have objected.

After the war came to an end, American support continued. On July 4th 1967 the UN held a vote to condemn Israel, for it?s quick annexation of the recently captured Arab portion of Jerusalem, which before the war was considered an international city. The American delegation claimed that the holy city should not be divided, changing their previous position, for the internationalization of the city. Subsequently, the U.S. obtained from the vote. (Lenczowski, page 114)

With the Israel being in a new position of power, Johnson saw this as an opportunity, to seek peace. Members of his staff felt that the Israeli victory over Soviet influenced states could be used to take big steps in the region. They saw the displayed superiority of American weapons and the humiliating loss of Egypt and Syria as an open door to take back the political stronghold in the Middle East. ?In a June 19th Radio address announced his ?Five Principals? for an Arab Israeli settlement.

1. The removal of threats against any nation in the region

2. Freedom of navigation

3. Justice for the refugees

4. An end to the arms race

5. Respect for political independence and territorial integrity for the states in the area

The principals were observed by Arabs to be pro Israel.?(Fraser, page, 87)

Throughout the conflict, Johnson and Russian President Alexi Kosygin stayed in close contact. Neither of the two were looking for a confrontation, although at times it came very close. The Israeli invasion of Syria almost led to a clash of the two super powers. Israel advancing fast into Syrian territory, threatening their national security.

The Soviets wanted the Israel?s to stop their invasion. They threatened to intervene. To which Johnson responded, by sending the Sixth fleet, close to the Syrian coastline. At this point in time, neither the U.S. nor the Soviets wanted to collide. As a result Johnson advised Israel to fall back, stating that soviet intervention was eminent. As a result, the Israeli army ceased fire, and withdrew keeping the Golan Heights.

The two leaders met in a conference after the conclusion of the war to discuss a joint peace effort. Kosygin was interested in peace, but was eager to see a return to the 1956 borders. Johnson sticking to his pro Israeli convictions argued a cease-fire without the removal of troops.

?Israel has received more u.s. foreign aid that any other nation. Between 1949 and 1981 the total amount of Us aid to Israel numbered 28.1 billion, of which 14.6 billion were outright grants. If you add the export-import loans and contributions from private individuals, institutions and Israel bonds the total number amounts to 43.2 billion.? (Lesch page 180)

The special relationship between America and Israel was fortified during the Johnson years. As stated before, if not for Johnson America and Israel would not share the special relationship that they do today. The actions taken are shown to be different than those of any of his predecessors. Although Kennedy took steps in the pro Israeli direction, policy did not take a full turn until the Johnson years.

The reasons for the change were obvious. Israel had historically aligned itself with the western powers, France, England, and the United States. Nations opposing Israel aligned with the Soviet Union. America had to support a democratic Ali. The cold war was a major factor in all American foreign policy.

Until Johnson came to power, Israel relied of France for its arms. This changed during the Johnson years. The Johnson years also marked a shift in regional power, with Israel emerging as the strongest nation in the Middle East. After the 1967 war, Israel was regarded as a strategic asset to the United States, and in post Johnson administrations was thus treated accordingly.

?I have always had a deep feeling of sympathy for Israel and his people, gallantly building and defending a modern nation against great odds and against the tragic back round of the Jewish experience?-Lyndon Johnson