

President Lyndon B. Johnson Speech, “Blockade of Israeli Shipping is Illegal” (23 May 1967)

Johnson, Lyndon B. "Blockade of Israeli Shipping Is Illegal." *The Jerusalem Post* [Jerusalem] 24 May 1967.



President Johnson meeting with Yitzhak Rabin in Washington. Photo: Israeli Government National Photo Archive

The U.S. is firmly committed to the support of the political independence and territorial integrity of all the countries of the Middle East, President Johnson said in a White House statement on Tuesday night. Part of the statement was published in the Late Edition (1 a.m.) of *The Jerusalem Post* yesterday. Here is the full text:

In recent days tension has again risen along the armistice lines between Israel and the Arab States. The situation there is a matter of grave concern to the whole

international community. We earnestly support all efforts, in and outside the United Nations and through its appropriate organs, including the Secretary-General, to reduce tension and to restore stability. The Secretary-General has gone to the Near East on his mission of peace with the hopes and prayers of men of good will everywhere.

The Near East links three continents. The birthplace of civilization and of three of the world's great religions, it is the home of some sixty million people and the crossroads between East and West.

The world community has vital interest in peace and stability in the Near East, one that has been expressed primarily through continuing United Nations action and assistance over the past 20 years.

DANGER OF MISCALCULATION

The United States, as a member of the U.N. and as a nation dedicated to a world order based on law and mutual respect, has actively supported efforts to maintain peace in the Near East. The

danger, and it is a grave danger, lies in some miscalculation arising from a misunderstanding of the intentions and actions of others. The Government of the U.S. is deeply concerned in particular with three potentially explosive aspects of the present confrontation.

First, we regret that the general armistice agreements have failed to prevent warlike acts from the territory of one against another government, or against civilians, or territory, under control of another.

Second, we are dismayed at the hurried withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force from Gaza and Sinai after more than ten years of steadfast and effective service in keeping the peace, without action by either the General Assembly or the Security Council. We continue to regard the presence of the U.N. in the area as a matter of fundamental importance and shall support its continuance with all possible vigour.

Third, we deplore the recent build-up of military forces and believe it a matter of urgent importance to reduce troop concentrations. The status of sensitive areas, as the Secretary-General emphasised in his report to the Security Council, such as the Gaza Strip and Gulf of Akaba, is a particularly important aspect of the situation.

INTERNATIONAL WATERWAY

In this connection I want to add that the purported closing of the Gulf of Akaba to Israeli shipping has brought a new and grave dimension to the crisis. The U.S. considers the gulf to be an international waterway and feels that a blockade of Israeli shipping is illegal and potentially disastrous to the cause of peace. The right of free innocent passage of the international waterway is a vital interest of the international community.

The Government of the U.S. is seeking clarification on this point. We have urged Secretary-General Thant to recognise the sensitivity of the Akaba question and to give it the highest priority in his discussions in Cairo.

To the leaders of all the nations of the Near East I wish to say what three Presidents have said before --- that the U.S. is firmly committed to the support of the political independence and territorial integrity of all the nations of the area. The U.S. strongly opposes aggression by anyone in the area, in any form, overt or clandestine. This has been the policy of the U.S. led by four Presidents --- President Truman, President Eisenhower, President Kennedy and myself --- as well as the policy of both of our political parties. The record of the actions of the U.S. over the past 20 years, within and outside the United Nations, is very clear on this point.

GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL

The U.S. has consistently sought to have good relations with all the states of the Near East. Regrettably this has not always been possible, but we are convinced that our differences with each other must be worked out peacefully and in accordance with accepted international practice.

We have always opposed --- and we oppose in other parts of the world at this moment --- the efforts of other nations to resolve their problems with their neighbours by aggression. We shall continue to do so, and we appeal to all other peace-loving nations to do likewise.

We call upon all concerned to observe in a spirit of restraint their solemn responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and the General Armistice Agreements. These provide an honourable means of preventing hostilities until, through the efforts of the international community, a peace with justice and honour can be achieved.

I have been in close contact and will be in the days ahead with Ambassador Goldberg at the U.N., where we are pursuing the matter with great vigour, and hope the Security Council can act effectively.