

**US Secretary of State Dean Rusk to American ambassadors explaining US position
vis a vis Israel's imminent choice to go to war.**

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207956. Eyes Only for Ambassador from Secretary.

I wish to express my personal appreciation to our Ambassadors in Arab Capitals for their full and timely reporting and for frank expressions of views on the present situation in the Near East. The considerations which you have advanced are being taken fully into account in a situation which is as complex and as dangerous as any we have faced. I should like to put before you some additional considerations and ask you to put your minds to possible solutions which can prevent war.

1. You should not assume that the United States can order Israel not to fight for what it considers to be its most vital interests. We have used the utmost restraint and, thus far, have been able to hold Israel back. But the "Holy War" psychology of the Arab world is matched by an apocalyptic psychology within Israel. Israel may make a decision that it must resort to force to protect its vital interests. In dealing with the issues involved, therefore, we must keep in mind the necessity for finding a solution with which Israel can be restrained.

2. Each side appears to look with relative equanimity upon the prospect of major hostilities and each side apparently is confident of success. Which estimate is correct cannot be fully known unless tested by the event but someone is making a major miscalculation. It does not help that Israel believes that time is working against them because of the continuing Arab build-up and deployment of forces. If anything could be done in the direction of reversing the mobilization on both sides, this would, of course, be a great advantage.

3. You should bear in mind the background of the application of the statement of four American Presidents that (to quote from President Johnson's statement of May 23) "The United States is firmly committed to the support of the political independence and territorial integrity of all the nations of that area." You will recall the actions taken by the Eisenhower Administration when Egypt was attacked by Israel, Britain and France and when Lebanon was seriously threatened by Syria. You will recall our steady and substantial support to Jordan to reinforce its position over and against Egypt. You will recall that President Kennedy sent a squadron of U.S. fighters to Saudi Arabia as a demonstration of support when Saudi Arabia was being threatened by Egypt. Most of you may know that we used a major diplomatic effort in Cairo to cool off subversive and propaganda assaults upon Libya. We supported Algeria's demand for independence and have tried to steady the nerves of Tunisia and Morocco when they felt threatened by

Algeria. When Israel has been attacked by terrorist groups we have supported Israel; when Israel resorted to disproportionate actions of retaliation against Samu in Jordan, we publicly and privately censored Israel in the strongest terms. I suggest we have a strong case for the idea that we have been even-handed with respect to the political independence and territorial integrity of Near Eastern countries.

A major issue for us in this present crisis involves the commitments we made at the time of the wind-up of the Suez affair. At that time we were acting on behalf of Egypt. As a part of the settlement which obtained the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Sinai, including Sharm el Sheikh, we assured Israel that we would support an international right of passage through the Strait of Tiran. We endorsed Israel's statement in the General Assembly (in fact it was drafted in consultation with Secretary Dulles) that Israel would have the right under Article 51 of the Charter to protect its flagships transiting that Strait if fired upon. Egypt was aware of these positions and, although it did not endorse them at the time, it was the beneficiary of the arrangements made.

4. The central principle of international law involved in the Strait of Tiran was encompassed in the Conventions on the law of the sea of 1958. This principle is of vital importance to us all over the world where there are many such narrow passages connecting bodies of international waters. In any event, the United States has given some pledges on the matter and we must give the most sober attention to all the implications of such pledges and any failure on our part to insist upon them.

5. There may be some flexibility in what Cairo would be willing to do before major hostilities. The Strait of Tiran is a key issue. The free passage of crude oil is a major part of that issue. We shall not know details until further explorations of the problem with Cairo or intermediaries. We cannot abandon, in principle, the right of Israeli flagships to transit the Strait. There might be some possibility of a breathing space if in fact passage were permitted for genuinely peaceful traffic, including crude oil. This is not a proposal on our side but an indication of a possible de facto standstill pending further diplomatic effort.

6. I have presented these considerations in order to enlist the best thought of our Ambassadors in Arab Capitals as to profitable approaches to the problem. It will do no good to ask Israel simply to accept the present status quo in the Strait because Israel will fight and we could not restrain her. We cannot throw up our hands and say that, in that event, let them fight while we try to remain neutral. I should be glad to have any further suggestions any of you might have on this situation.

Rusk