American Decision Making and the 1967 Arab-Israeli Conflict

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February 27, 2009

Abstract (209 words): It is become common to argue that a special relationship exists between the United States and Israel and that this relationship explains unconditional American support for Israeli policies. These arguments generally focus on the period after the 1967 war. This makes examination of the period immediately before this time especially useful for understanding the nature of American relations with Israel. If this period marks the beginning of a special relationship, then there should be initial indicators of that relationship and its impact on the policy making process. In 1967, American policy was initially designed to accomplish the relatively modest goal of preventing an Israeli preemptive attack while building support for a multilateral plan to reopen the Gulf of Aqaba. Yet, the United States ultimately failed to achieve either objective. Given the potential danger of war to American interests, a strategic analysis of this case might predict active and vigorous efforts, using all aspects of American power, to prevent conflict. The puzzle is why this did not occur. By examining a purely systemic explanation for American actions in 1967, this paper will explore the complexities and tensions in the United States-Israel relationship in 1967 and investigate the nature through which domestic politics and decision making factors influence American foreign policy.

Word Count: 7,581

Mearsheimer and Walt's (2007) critique of the influence of the Israel Lobby on American foreign policy ignited a wide variety of criticism and debate. Yet, even before these exchanges, arguments that a special relationship between the United States and Israel could explain unconditional American support for Israeli policies were hardly rare. Since these arguments tended to originate in the period after the 1967 war, examination of the period immediately before the war may prove especially useful for understanding the evolution of American relations with Israel. In 1967, American policy was initially designed to accomplish the relatively modest goal of preventing an Israeli preemptive attack while building support for a multilateral plan to reopen the Gulf of Aqaba. Yet, the United States ultimately failed to achieve either objective. The critical puzzle was why, since the United States had such a strategic interest in preventing war, it did not make a greater effort to prevent war. By examining a purely systemic explanation for American actions in 1967, this paper will investigate the nature through which domestic politics and decision making factors influenced American foreign policy. This paper will argue that systemic conditions were necessary but not sufficient explanations for American foreign policy in 1967. Instead, American policy was constrained by the influence of both domestic politics and the decision making process. By examining the nature of American domestic politics and decision making in 1967, it is possible to explore the complexities and tensions in the United States-Israel relationship.[1]

Levels of Analysis and American Foreign Policy

Holsti's (2004, 51-53) description of realism and its challengers highlighted the difficulties inherent in explaining American foreign policy. The need for both systemic and decision making approaches led to situations in which "...both approaches are necessary and neither is

sufficient." Determining which approach to use became dependent on the question under examination and the specificity and comprehensiveness of the desired analysis (Holsti 2004, 83-84). Given this problem, one way to systematically evaluate different explanations is to utilize Ikenberry's (2005, 2-7) framework of dividing theories into structural explanations, at both the international and domestic levels, and decision-making explanations.

Systemic theories have collectively argued that the structure of the international system provides both necessary and sufficient conditions for American foreign policy. This assertion was based on key assumptions concerning the state, state interests, and the nature of the international system. A number of scholars have based arguments on the anarchic structure of the international system and the implications of the lack of central authority. While these arguments differ in many ways, they share a number of similarities. The sovereign nation-state was the unit of analysis of the system, monopolizing the legitimate use of force, and distinguished by differences in capabilities (Waltz 1979, 88-99). Imperfect information concerning the future intentions of other states, combined with the lack of any central authority, created fear and forced states to execute self-help strategies for achieving security (Mearsheimer 2001, 29-40). The capabilities of a given state consisted of the military, economic, and potential variables that defined the material resources available for that state to execute its foreign policy (Morgenthau 1954, 102-137). The rational state deliberately calculated the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action for maximizing power and security. When expected benefits exceeded expected costs, the state had incentives to act (Gilpin 1981, 9-15).

Theories based on domestic structure have collectedly argued that while systemic factors may provide necessary conditions for American foreign policy, the search for sufficient conditions must include analysis of the impact of the American political system. In examining the

dynamics of the American political system, the role of institutions, political parties, and interest groups tend to lead to complications in the formulation and execution of coherent foreign policy strategies. Mearsheimer and Walt's (2007) arguments concerning the influence of the Israel Lobby represents one example of this approach. Although Mearsheimer and Walt (2007, 24-26) argued that the special relationship fully developed after the 1967 War, it remained useful to examine how the proposed mechanisms of the lobby operated before the lobby itself was fully established. The authors' normative implications aside, the mechanisms they advance for why United States policy was biased in favor of Israel tended to focus on the actions of decentralized actors in the American political system who collectively bend American foreign policy so it supports Israel. These mechanisms include a number of arguments based on the influence of domestic structure including: influence on Congress, pressure and influence on the President, and manipulation of the media and discourse (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 151-196). A question that must be considered was how these mechanisms influenced American foreign policy.

Analysis of the nature of state decision making and its influence of foreign policy tends to stress the importance of the influence of individual and small group factors. Allison and Zelikow's (1999, 2-7) articulation of the rational actor, organizational behavior, and government politics models formed a useful basis for the examination of how deviations from purely cost-benefit calculations impacted state foreign policy. Instead of the rational comparison of alternative courses of action, these conceptual frameworks opened the door to the argument that policy outcomes resulted from bargaining among hierarchical actors within the United States government. Foreign policy was a political outcome that resulted from compromise, coalitions,

competitions, and confusion among government officials with different positions on the issues (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 294-313).

In summary, the framework established for this study involves examination of the effects of international structure on American foreign policy in order to establish a rational baseline for use in determining whether systemic factors provide both necessary and sufficient conditions for explaining that policy. When such an approach results in anomalies, additional examination of the influence of domestic structure and decision making variables becomes warranted.

Research Design

The remainder of this paper will examine the American response to the 1967 Arab-Israeli Conflict. The paper will identify key American decisions and examine the influence of the strategic context on American policy. This will test the extent that structural conditions alone explained American foreign policy, resulting in the identification of puzzles not explained by a solely strategic approach to the problem. These puzzles will then be subjected to examination from additional theoretical perspectives. This will be accomplished by analyzing the influence of domestic politics and decision making on the American reactions to crisis in the Middle East. By tracing the impact of domestic politics and decision making variables through the crisis, it will be possible to examine their influence relative to a purely structural account. This will highlight the complexities and tensions of the U.S.-Israel relationship in 1967.

The proposed research design does suffer from the limitation of being a single case study approach to study of American foreign policy. This limits the ability of the analysis to conduct generalizable causal inference. Yet, the general limitations of single observation studies are subject to two caveats. First, while a limited number of observations threatens the ability to

conduct causal inference it remains possible to conduct descriptive inference of American policy. Second, while the 1967 Arab-Israeli Conflict was only a single case, the case involved a large number of observations of the theoretical propositions being tested. Based on this fact, the conclusions reached in this analysis can be compared to results from other tests in order to further understanding of American foreign policy (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 208-212; Lakatos 1967). In any event, future research on this topic to examine additional cases remains warranted.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli War

During the crisis period preceding the onset of hostilities in June 1967, the United States pursued a policy designed to prevent an Israeli preemptive attack while building support for a multilateral plan to reopen the Gulf of Aqaba. These policies were designed to prevent the crisis from escalating into open conflict that could endanger American interests in the region and possibly lead to direct conflict between the superpowers. Yet, the United States ultimately failed to achieve either objective. The critical puzzle was why, since the United States had a strategic interest in preventing war, it did not make a greater effort to prevent war. The following sections will examine the strategic, domestic, and decision making contexts of the crisis.

International Structure

A systemic explanation for American policy in 1967 must focus on the bipolar structure of the international system. Whetten's (1977, 1-2) examination of great power behavior in 1967 led to the conclusion that the system was characterized by a decline in great power confrontation. Given the strategic importance of the Middle East as a source of raw materials, both the United

States and Soviet Union had strategic interests in maintaining both access and influence in the region. Following the 1956 Suez Crisis, both states continued attempts to gain influence while avoiding any direct conflict that threatened their access and trade. The Soviet Union actively provided both military and economic aid to Egypt and Syria, while encouraging their cooperation to oppose American interests in the region (Whetten 1977, 1-2).

These actions were perceived in the United States as indications that the Soviet Union did not desire war, and would use the influence gained by selling arms to restrain its allies. These perceptions were based on the Soviet Union having limited missile sales to Syria and supported a more moderate policy toward Israel for its Arab allies. Soviet moderation consisted of acceptance of Israeli's right to exist and opposition to the more aggressive policies of Syria and Egypt (Whetten 1977, 3-4). During this period, both superpowers called for political solutions to ongoing border conflicts, but did not actually take efforts to defuse tension in the region, instead assuring their respective allies of support (Gawrych 2000, 8).

Prior to the crisis, American evaluations of the Middle East indicated a low probability of conflict. In addition to the growth of Israeli relative military power, Egypt did not appear able to offer a military challenge. The United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) was deployed to the Sinai between Egyptian and Israeli forces and a large number of Egyptian troops remained deployed in a fifth year of involvement in the Yemeni Civil War (Whetten 1977, 3; Gawrych 2000, 2-3). Bregman (2002, 63) argued that without Egyptian military support neither Jordan nor Syria were expected to attack. Finally, both Israel and Syria were also focused on domestic matters (Gawrych 2000, 2-3). Regardless, border clashes continued to contribute to regional instability and created pressure on the parties involved. Oren (2002, 45) asserted that there had been a 100% increase in incidents on the Jordanian border in early 1967. For example, the

Israeli raid into Jordan on 13 Nov 1966 and the border clash with Syria on 7 Apr 1967 increased tensions and anxiety in the region (Quandt 2005, 24; Oren 2002, 33-36). Israeli victory in the April air battle increased pressure on Egypt to act in accordance with United Arab Republic (UAR) defense agreements (Gawrych 2000, 4-8).

The crisis arguably began on 13 May 1967 when the Soviet Union warned Syria that Israel was massing troops near the Golan Heights (Whetten 1977, 4). While these reports were erroneous (Quandt 2005, 24), they were likely influenced by the Soviet evaluation of Israel's relative military strength and the relative lack of threat to Israel from Egypt due to the number of troops deployed to Yemen. In this context, Israeli reactions to border instability were perceived as a threat to the regimes in Egypt and Syria, and were correspondingly a threat to Soviet influence in the Middle East (Whetten 1977, 4).

In accordance with its treaty obligations, Egypt moved troops into the Sinai on 14 May in order to deter an Israeli attack against Syria (Quandt 2005, 24). A telegram from the American embassy in Israel to the Department of State indicated that the first reports on Egyptian troop movements reached the United States on 15 May (U.S. Department of State 2004a; hereafter FRUS). Egyptian actions were initially perceived by the United States as a show of force. This changed on 16 May when Egypt requested the removal of UNEF forces from the Sinai. A memorandum to President Johnson on 17 May indicated that Egyptian troops were in the Sinai based on Syrian misinformation concerning a potential Israeli attack, Israeli threats, and pressure from Arab States for Egypt to react to any Israeli attack on Syria. The memorandum acknowledged the possibility of Syria using terrorist attacks to provoke an Israeli attack in order to bring Egypt into the conflict (FRUS 2004b). American deliberations reflected concern with the implications of conflict in the region on American strategic interests and recognized the

danger that would be involved if Egypt closed the Strait of Tiran to Israeli traffic. The United States recognized that the removal of the UNEF troops would increase the probability of the Strait being closed (Quandt 2005, 25-26).

Oren (2002, 75) argued that conditions in the region further escalated following a 17 May Egyptian reconnaissance of the Israeli nuclear reactor at Dimona. This created fear in Israel that its pursuit of a nuclear capacity would impel a preemptive strike. "Israel's fear for the reactor – rather than Egypt's *of* it – was the greater catalyst for war" (Oren 2002, 76; emphasis added by Oren). This evidence provided some indications that American decision makers were acting in accordance with the expectations of structural imperatives. The United States was concerned with how regional conflict would impact its strategic interests and with the dangers that would be involved in Egyptian actions to close the Strait of Tiran. Yet, given the acknowledgment by decision makers that the removal of UNEF troops would make closure of the Strait more likely, a first puzzle in this strategic analysis was the lack of American action to delay that removal. From 16 May, when Egypt requested the removal of the UNEF troops, until 18 May, when UN Secretary General U Thant approved the removal, the United States did not make any efforts to delay the United Nations from responding to the Egyptian request (Quandt 2005, 27). While the Unites States may not have been able to stop the withdrawal altogether, a delay would certainly have allowed time to develop the situation.

While the United States did not take action with the United Nations to delay the removal of UNEF troops, it did take action to ensure that regional conflict would not spread. In a 19 May letter to Premier Kosygin, President Johnson suggested that the superpowers coordinate their actions to prevent the crisis from escalating into open war (Quandt 2005, 26). During the remainder of the period before 22 May, the United States continued internal deliberations but did

not communicate any deterrent actions to Egypt. When the United States did finally respond to Egypt, the communication did not reach President Nassar until after the 22 May announcement that Egypt was closing the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping (Quandt 2005, 27-28). This represented a second puzzle. Given the American concern with the strategic implications of the crisis, a timely deterrent threat might have prevented Egypt from closing the Strait and escalating the crisis. Yet, during the period from 16-22 May, the United States did not take any action and the eventual communication did not reach President Nassar until after he had announced the closure.

After the closure of the Strait, the United States took immediate action both to articulate opposition to Egypt's actions and to convince Israel not to take any unilateral action. This resulted in Israel agreeing to a 48 hour delay. During a National Security Council (NSC) meeting on 24 May 1967, President Johnson expressed concern with Soviet involvement in the crisis. Although the consensus at the meeting was that the Soviet Union was not responsible, decision makers believed that any American involvement would be quickly exploited. The perception that the United States was involved in an Israeli instigated conflict would be a propaganda victory for the Soviet Union that would turn Arab states against the United States (FRUS 2004c). At this point, the upcoming visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Eban led the United States to energize its plans for reopening the Strait. When Foreign Minister Eban arrived, his initial meetings with the State Department stressed Israeli intelligence that an attack was imminent (FRUS 2004d). The United States evaluated those claims, before deciding on 26 May that an attack was not imminent (Quandt 2005, 30-32).

In this context, the NSC met on 26 May in preparation for President Johnson's meeting with Foreign Minister Eban. The President expressed his support for the multilateral plan for opening

the Strait while focusing on how to keep Israel from attacking before the plan could be implemented. At the meeting with Foreign Minister Eban later that day, he used the phrase "Israel will not be alone unless it decides to go alone" to communicate American opposition to any unilateral attack (Quandt 2005, 33-35). At the same time that the United States was acting to restrain Israel, President Nassar was involved in meetings with the Soviet Union. The Soviets "...offered diplomatic, financial, and material assistance but at the same time urged the exhaustion of every possible effort to avoid the outbreak of war" (Gawrych 2000, 8-9). Following these meetings, the Soviet Union warned the United States on 27 May that Israeli preemption was likely (Quandt 2005, 36), and Israel agreed on 28 May to allow time for American diplomacy to work (Gawrych 2000, 9). Tensions at this point were escalated by the militarization of the Sinai, the placement of Jordanian and Syrian troops under UAR command, a Jordan-Egypt mutual defense pact, and the deployment of Iraqi and Syrian reinforcements to Jordan (Gawrych 2000, 10; Quandt 2005, 37).

During this period, the United States continued to focus on the strategic implications of any conflict. A 30 May report to President Johnson stressed that a military attack on Israel was not imminent, and that if an attack occurred Israel would likely win, making it possible to wait without danger (FRUS 2004e). A memo to President Johnson written the same day confirmed the danger to the United States position in the Middle East due to prevailing perceptions of the conflict in the region. In addition, there was concern that battlefield losses could result in involvement by the superpowers that would dangerously escalate the dispute (FRUS 2004f). Yet, during the period from 29 May – 5 Jun the United States did not take any additional actions to deter Israeli unilateral action. A third puzzle for this systemic analysis was why the United States made such efforts before 28 May, but then not again before hostilities commenced. Both

the United States and Soviet Union had an interest in ensuring that any Israeli military victory did not result in the overthrow of the regimes in Egypt or Syria. Even if the existing governments were undesirable, they were better than the uncertainty and instability that would likely result from regime change (Whetten 1977, 12).

The preceding examination of the influence of the strategic context on American policy during the period before the 1967 Arab-Israeli Conflict identified three puzzles that provided indications that structural conditions alone could not explain American foreign policy. The first puzzle was why the United States did not take action to prevent the United Nations from removing UNEF troops during the period from the Egyptian request on 16 May until the United Nations approval of that request on 18 May. The second puzzle was why the United States did not make an attempt to deter Egypt from closing the Strait of Tiran during the period from 16-22 May. The third puzzle was why the United States made such an effort to deter any Israeli attack before 28 May, but then not again before hostilities commenced. Given the potential strategic danger of war to American interests, active and vigorous efforts, using all aspects of American power, would be expected to prevent conflict. Why did this not occur?

Domestic Structure

One potential reason why the United States did not make a greater effort to prevent war was the influence of domestic politics. Reich (2003, 234) analyzed the special relationship between the United States and Israel. He concluded that an "...important political factor in the U.S.-Israeli relationship has been the U.S. Congress." Yet, while Israel was an important issue in American domestic politics, there was little evidence that public opinion or the Israeli lobby directly influenced American policy. With the exception of Reich (2003) and Quandt (2005), the

literature reviewed in this work largely ignored the impact of domestic politics on decisions made during the crisis. In fact, the prominence of President Johnson in the process and the crisis conditions created a context in which decision makers were largely insulated from the influence of domestic politics. This set conditions in which many of the causal mechanisms argued by Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) were unlikely to exert a definitive influence of policymakers.

While there was little evidence that domestic politics had a direct role on American policy, there was evidence of indirect influences. The domestic political context defined the American courses of action for preventing war: ensuring that Israel did not strike first and reopening the Gulf of Aqaba within a multilateral context. During the deliberations precipitated by Egypt's 16 May request for the removal of UNEF forces, President Johnson was constrained by Congressional reaction to the earlier Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (Quandt 2005, 26 and 29). After the greatly deepened American involvement in Vietnam that followed the earlier authorization, many had charged that he had misled Congress and used it as a blank check to escalate involvement in Vietnam. This theme was evident during deliberations surrounding American plans for reopening the Strait of Tiran. In addition, President Johnson perceived political danger in taking unilateral action without the full support of Congress. The only way around Congressional opposition was to involve the United Nations (UN) and present any plan for action in a multilateral context (Quandt 2005, 29).

In addition to operating as a constraint on the development of courses of action, Quandt (2005, 29) also identified an internal inconsistency in United States policy caused by the influence of domestic politics.

> To keep Israel from acting on its own...an acceptable alternative had to be presented. The stronger the stand of the United States...the more likely it was that Israel could be restrained; by the same token, the less likely it was that Nassar would probe further. Yet a strong American stand was incompatible

> with the desire for multilateral action, which had to be tried, in Johnson's view, to ensure congressional and public support.

This dilemma reinforced the impact of the earlier Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Controversy over the war in Vietnam constrained the ability of the United States to create a policy that could reconcile the need for strong deterrence with congressional desire to avoid involvement in another regional conflict. It was this controversy over Vietnam, and not the influence of a special relationship with Israel, that dominated President Johnson's relations with Congress in 1967.

While the evidence indicated that domestic politics had an indirect influence on the development of American courses of action during the crisis, the question remained of whether domestic politics offered a sufficient explanation for the three puzzles identified with a structural account of American policy. Domestic politics did not offer an adequate explanation for the first puzzle, not taking action to prevent the United Nations from removing UNEF troops. Domestic politics may have constrained the development of American courses of action, but it would not have prevented the United States from taking action in the United Nations. Not only would this have represented a multilateral context, but it would not have involved any direct American threats or plans to use force. While the UNEF troops could not have stopped Egypt from deploying troops into the Sinai, their continued presence would likely have constrained Egypt from escalating the conflict by either attacking the UNEF or closing the Strait of Tiran. Domestic politics also did not offer an adequate explanation for the second puzzle, not taking action to deter Egypt from closing the Strait of Tiran. Domestic politics may have constrained the content of any deterrent threat to Egypt. Yet, it would not have constrained the United States from sending the threat in the first place. In fact, the United States did communicate with Egypt on 22 May, but the message arrived too late to reach President Nassar before he announced his

decision to close the Strait of Tiran. If anything, domestic politics can only account for this delay.

Analysis of Egyptian decision making during this period provided indications that a deterrent threat from the United States could have made an impact. President Nassar's decision to close the Strait appeared to be based on a cycle of escalation that was based on the domestic and inter-Arab political context and not the military situation with Israel. The possibility existed that the cycle could have been broken by refocusing President Nassar on the international context of the crisis. Bregman (2002, 72) argued that Egypt closed the Strait, knowing that war would be certain, in order to divert Israeli attention from Syria. Yet, Amos' (1979) analysis of the context surrounding President Nassar's decision indicated that a series of local conflicts in the region had become linked to larger Arab conflicts. Egyptian decision making during the crisis reflected concern with wiping out the "shame" of 1948 and with fighting against western domination. He described "mounting inter-Arab pressure for war" in which escalations by Egypt led to attempts by other Arab states to do better to prevent Nassar from obtaining a political victory. (Amos 1979, 57-62). Whetten (1977, 6-7) further argued that the closure of the Strait eliminated Soviet leverage on Egypt. While the Soviet Union had a vested interested in keeping the Strait open in order to delegitimize any similar action in the Dardanelles, they had to support Egypt's action or risk the loss of all influence with Nassar. Given the domestic context driving Egypt's decision to close the Strait, and the Soviet Union's lack of leverage, timely action by the United States might have prevented Egypt from closing the Strait of Tiran.

Domestic politics did come closer to providing an explanation for the third puzzle, the American failure to take action to deter an Israeli attack after 28 May. This conclusion was based on Quandt's analysis of a dilemma in American policy. The dilemma was not relevant to

the first two puzzles. Neither action in the United Nations to prevent the removal of UNEF troops nor providing a deterrent threat to Egypt prior to the closure of the Strait of Tiran would have conflicted with congressional desire to minimize American involvement in another regional conflict. Yet, in the case of the third puzzle, the opposite was true. As the crisis escalated, it became increasingly difficult to restrain Israel. Doing so would likely have required the United States to either present a credible plan to reopen the Strait of Tiran or to provide unilateral commitments to intervene. Clearly, unilateral action was constrained by domestic politics. Yet, it was more difficult to argue that domestic politics kept the United States from presenting a credible multilateral plan to reopen the Strait of Tiran. Contrary to arguments of unconditional American support for Israel, in this case the influence of domestic politics seems to have prevented the United States from assuming a more active role in support of Israel.

While there was no evidence that domestic politics directly shaped United States policy during the crisis, it was also impossible to rule out that influence. This uncertainty grew out of President Johnson's decision to depart Washington for his Texas ranch without any foreign policy advisors during the Memorial Day weekend. Given the importance of the crisis, this decision was highly unusual. Since President Johnson spent the weekend with Arthur Krim, who was serving as the Finance Chair of the Democratic National Finance Committee, it was likely that domestic politics was on the agenda. In addition, given President Johnson's long political career and the challenge posed by Robert Kennedy's campaign, it was likely that he was personally concerned with the domestic political implications of the foreign policy crisis. Given these facts, it was impossible to rule out that President Johnson was personally concerned with avoiding the perception that his policy was too tough on Israel. This perception could have damaged his support from the Israeli lobby that was an important part of his domestic political

base at a time when Kennedy was mounting a serious challenge to his reelection.[2] While there is no direct evidence that this concern affected American decision making, there was some circumstantial evidence that it influenced the fact that the United States did not pressure Israel not to launch a preemptive attack after 28 May. Quandt (2005, 41) argued that President Johnson was informed of an imminent Israeli attack on 3 Jun while attending a Democratic Party event in New York. Yet, during the 24 hour period between this notification and the 5 Jun Israeli attack President Johnson did not take action to further deter Israel.

Decision Making

A second potential explanation for the three puzzles was the influence of bureaucratic politics. Analysis of decision making in 1967 indicated that American policy in this case was influenced by bureaucratic politics. These observations were primarily concentrated around the preparation of plans for reopening the Strait of Tiran and specifically on the period prior to visit Israeli Foreign Minister Eban's meeting with President Johnson on 26 May. On 24 May, American and English representatives met to review the proposed American strategy for a multilateral naval plan to reopen the strait. The plan proposed would combine escort operations in the Strait with a show of force in the Mediterranean (FRUS 2004g). Problems emerged after the Department of Defense (DOD) was tasked to articulate the operational details of the plan.

While the Pentagon asserted that the United States was capable of conducting simultaneous operations in both the Middle East and Vietnam, it was convinced that Israel did not need the assistance. The Pentagon was not in favor of the use of force to reopen the Strait of Tiran. This option was perceived as too dangerous for American forces due to the exposed nature of the operation and the practical difficulties coordinating combined operations of that nature (Quandt

2005, 30-31). Unlike the DOD, the State Department did favor the use of force for reopening the Strait. The practical military difficulties of the operation were viewed as subordinate to the international benefits of having forces in the region to deter further escalation of the crisis. At this point in the planning, the State Department was working to obtain international support for the naval force, but without the close coordination with the DOD necessary to fully integrate the diplomatic and military components of the planning (Quandt 2005, 31). The divisions within the bureaucracy over the plans emerged again at the 26 May NSC meeting conducted immediately before President Johnson's meeting with Foreign Minister Eban. When deliberation turned to the plans to reopen the Strait, Secretary of Defense McNamara "...stat[ed] his disapproval of the idea on military grounds" (Quandt 2005, 33).

While bureaucratic politics influenced American policy, in terms of explaining the three puzzles, it did poorly. The only puzzle that bureaucratic politics came close to explaining was why the United States did not do more to deter Israeli unilateral action after 28 May. As the crisis escalated, it became increasingly difficult to restrain Israel. Doing so would likely have required the United States to either present a credible plan, supported by the international community, to reopen the Strait of Tiran or to credibly provide a unilateral commitment to intervene. The United States was unable to make a credible commitment to intervene due to the constraints of domestic politics. Bureaucratic politics provided a potential explanation for why the United States did not do more to present a credible multilateral plan for reopening the Strait of Tiran. As a result, the combination of domestic politics and bureaucratic politics does provide a sufficient explanation for the third puzzle.

One reason why bureaucratic politics alone was not a sufficient explanation was related to conditions during the crisis. During the initial stages of the process for developing an

operational plan for opening the Strait of Tiran, conditions were not conducive to bureaucratic politics having a determinant influence on American policy. As Krasner's (1972) critique of Allison highlighted, high levels of Presidential attention during the crisis created conditions in which Presidential leadership, and not bureaucratic politics, determined American policy. This changed over the Memorial Day weekend when President Johnson went to his ranch in Texas without taking any foreign policy advisors. At this point, there was little presidential participation in the process, and there is little evidence that President Johnson took action to ensure that his selected policy was implemented. While it is impossible to confirm why President Johnson left Washington during this critical period, it was also impossible to rule out that he had acknowledged the inherent dilemma of United States policy and chosen not to further impede Israel from acting. In order to deter Israel, the United States had to provide a credible alternative to unilateral Israeli military action. While bureaucratic politics could provide an explanation for the failure of plans to provide that alternative, another explanation is that President Johnson intentionally did not intervene in the process because he recognized that the plan could not provide a credible alternative for Israel and intentionally chose not to intervene in order to create conditions for Israel to act alone.[3]

While bureaucratic politics did not provide a completely sufficient explanation for the puzzles, an explanation with more potential explanatory weigh was the influence of the decision making process. The first issue concerned the conduct of decision making following the 16 May Egyptian request to remove UNEF forces from the Sinai. During the period from 16-22 May, Quandt (2005, 25-27 and 49-50) argued that there was little discussion of the core assumptions behind American policy, little consideration of alternative courses of action, and no effort to relate policy to outcome. While expecting decision makers to accurately predict the future may

be a difficult standard, the expectation remained that they would at least consider post-war planning and consequences when formulating policy. Notes from a 19 May meeting with President Johnson indicated that there was little discussion of contingency planning for the crisis, even though it was on the agenda for the meeting (FRUS 2005h). If decision makers had addressed alternative courses of action in the context of achieving a specific policy outcome, then the United States may have acted during the period before 18 May to prevent the United Nations from removing UNEF forces and during the period before 22 May to deter Egyptian escalation.

A second issue with decision making in 1967 concerned the impact of unofficial diplomatic channels. Specifically, this involved the argument that unofficial diplomatic contacts undermined American attempts to stop an Israeli preemptive attack. Quandt (2005, 36-41) examined the role of Justice Fortas, who had the ear of President Johnson and was a strong supporter of Israel. Justice Fortas attended the 26 May NSC meeting preceding Foreign Minister Eban's meeting with President Johnson. During this meeting Secretary Rusk argued for a "red light" approach to Israel, while Justice Fortas argued for a "yellow light." If the United States was "unwilling or unable to use force to reopen the strait" then Israel should be implicitly allowed to take unilateral action. Brecher (1980, 147) argued that after Foreign Minister Eban's meeting with President Johnson, Israel became confused by conflicting signals from the United States. There was little evidence that the plan for a multilateral force to open the Strait of Tiran was progressing, and there had been no pressure from the United States to wait since 28 May. (Brecher 1980, 157; Druks 2001, 33-40). In addition, a letter from President Johnson was interpreted as evidence that the United States would not oppose an Israeli unilateral action by repeating actions taken during the 1956 Suez Crisis (Brecher 1980, 163-164). Foreign Minister

Eban also emphasized that the United States would not isolate Israel if there was an attack (Brecher 1980, 166-167). Parker (1993, 114) furthered this analysis by arguing that Foreign Minister Eban had decided to wait, but changed his mind on 1 Jun – when "an American, known for his close contact with government thinking" indicated that Israel had waiting long enough to satisfy the United States (Parker 1993, 120-121).

Parker's (1993) examination of the role of miscalculation on the conflict provided a different analysis of this conclusion. He argued that "[i]n fact, the record shows that the United States made a serious effort to restrain both Israel and Egypt" (Parker 1993, 112). For Parker, the nine messages sent by the United States to Israel warning against a unilateral attack were evidence of American efforts to deter Israel. He argued that the United States was able to delay an Israeli attack, but that the costs of mobilization on Israel would be unbearable unless the Egyptian military threat was moderated. He concluded that the American failure to provide an "ironclad commitment" to the Strait of Tiran and the American failure to confront Egypt with military force, and not the failure to deter, were the cause of the Israeli decision to attack (Parker 1993, 115-118). In addition, he also pressed the role of Egyptian miscalculations in his account, namely the belief that the United States could control Israel (Parker 1993, 113). Gerges (2003) reinforced this analysis of Egyptian miscalculations in his analysis of Arab views of the American role in the crisis. These included the common conceptions of an American conspiracy against Egypt and President Johnson's pro-Israeli tilt (Gerges 2003, 192-193 and 196).

Although these arguments based on misperception explain some details of how the crisis unfolded, they do not adequately explain the puzzle over the American lack of effort to restrain Israel as well as analysis of the role of unofficial diplomatic contacts. Quandt (2005) argued that Justice Fortas' unofficial contacts gave Israel the impression of an American "green light" for

preemption. Instead of accomplishing the objective of restraining Israel, United States diplomatic activity during the crisis was perceived by Israel as setting the conditions for an Israeli attack. Israel's earlier restraint assured them of American support in the post-war settlement process, and created permissive conditions for a preemptive strike. Bregman (2002, 83-84) concluded that while the Soviet Union had consistently given Egypt a "red light" the United States had given Israel a "yellow light" that was then interpreted by Israel as a "green light" for a preemptive attack on Egypt. The result, as demonstrated by a 16 Jul 1990 letter from former Israeli Foreign Minister Eban, was that Israel became certain that the United States could not act. This resulted in the Israeli Foreign Ministry removing its call for military restraint and the decision to launch a preemptive attack.[4]

Conclusion

Strategic considerations provided a necessary but not sufficient explanation for American policy during the period before the 1967 Arab-Israeli Conflict. Systemic factors could not explain why the United States did not take action to prevent the United Nations from removing UNEF troops during the period from the Egyptian request on 16 May until the United Nations approval of that request on 18 May. They also could not explain why the United States did not make an attempt to deter Egypt from closing the Strait of Tiran during the period from 16-22 May or why the United States no longer made comprehensive efforts to deter Israel after 28 May. Given the potential strategic danger of war to American interests, active and vigorous efforts, using all aspects of American power, might be expected to prevent conflict. The puzzle was why this did not occur.

Examination of the influence of domestic politics indicated that it did play a role in

constraining American policy. While there was no evidence that domestic politics directly shaped United States policy during the crisis, it did constrain the development of American courses of action. Although domestic politics cannot explain why the United States did not do more to stop the UN from removing UNEF forces, it most likely did influence the content and timing of the deterrence of Egypt. Domestic politics came closer to providing an explanation for the third puzzle. As the crisis escalated, it became increasingly difficult to restrain Israel. Doing so would likely have required the United States to either present a credible plan to reopen the Strait of Tiran or to provide unilateral commitments to intervene. Domestic politics constrained the United States from providing a unilateral commitment, and also may have influenced President Johnson to stop putting pressure on Israel in order to avoid the loss of domestic political support at a time when he was facing a reelection challenge. Yet, it was more difficult to argue that domestic politics kept the United States from presenting a credible multilateral plan to reopen the Strait.

The variable that did offer an explanation that answered the puzzles of this case was the influence of the decision making process. There was some evidence that American policy in this case was influenced by bureaucratic politics. During the initial stages of the process for developing an operational plan for opening the Strait of Tiran, conditions were not conducive to bureaucratic politics having a determinant influence on American policy. This changed over the Memorial Day weekend when President Johnson went to his ranch in Texas without taking any foreign policy advisors. While it was difficult to confirm why President Johnson left Washington during this critical period, it was impossible to rule out that he had acknowledged the inherent dilemma of United States policy and chosen not to further impede Israel from acting. In order to deter Israel, the United States had to provide a credible alternative to unilateral Israeli

military action. While bureaucratic politics could provide an explanation for the failure of plans to provide that alternative, another explanation is that President Johnson intentionally did not intervene in the process because he recognized that the plan could not provide a credible alternative for Israel and intentionally chose not to intervene in order to create conditions for Israel to act alone.

While bureaucratic politics did not provide a completely sufficient explanation, an explanation with more potential explanatory weigh was the influence of the decision making process. The first issue concerned the conduct of decision making following the 16 May Egyptian request to remove UNEF forces from the Sinai. If decision makers had addressed alternative courses of action in the context of achieving a specific policy outcome, then the United States may have acted during the period before 18 May to prevent the United Nations from removing UNEF forces and during the period before 22 May to deter Egyptian escalation.

A second issue with decision making concerned the impact of the use of unofficial diplomatic channels. While it is difficult to determine if Justice Fortas was acting under the specific direction of President Johnson, he was specifically invited by the President to attend NSC discussions of American policy. His subsequent unofficial communications with Israel were very likely critical to the Israeli decision to attack. Given President Johnson's friendship with Justice Fortas, it was unlikely that the President was unaware of his friend's contacts with Israel. Given this knowledge, and the previously successful efforts to deter Israel before 28 May, if the United States was committed to deterring Israel it would clearly have taken additional action after 28 May. The only logical conclusion for this lapse was that either the United States was no longer committed to deterring Israel or that the decision making context resulted in the failure to realize that further action was needed in order to deter Israel. Either way, the combined

influence of domestic politics and irregularities in the decision making process provided a sufficient explanation for the puzzles of a purely structural explanation for the American reaction to the 1967 Arab-Israeli Conflict.

The question that remains is whether the explanations for the three puzzles with the strategic account of 1967 are consistent with an argument that a special relationship explains American support for Israel. As expected, in this case, the evidence was somewhat limited. Although President Johnson and his advisors may have personally supported Israel, the influence of domestic politics and bureaucratic politics operated inconsistently with expectations of unconditional support for Israel. Since arguments concerning the special relationship between the United States and Israel tend to originate in the period after the 1967 war, this conclusion was unsurprising. Yet, it did highlight the difficulty in arguing that that any one factor can adequately explain American foreign policy. In 1967, Congressional opposition to President Johnson due to Vietnam constrained the United States from acting unilaterally in support of Israel at the same time that bureaucratic politics constrained the United States from operating multilaterally in support of Israel. The closest evidence that might fit into the future special relationship argument is the use of unofficial diplomatic channels in 1967. Yet, to argue that President Johnson's personal relationship with Justice Fortas represented the influence of Israel may not be the best interpretation of the evidence. Taking the evidence as a whole, the 1967 war seems a better example of a United States-Israel relationship characterized by complexity and tension. It was not a relationship of unconditional support but a relationship fraught with difficulty and uncertainty on both sides.

Notes

[1] This paper is a revised version of one presented at the International Studies Association (ISA) 2009 Conference in New York City. I am indebted to Dr. Jonathan Cristol for his comments and review. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy for their support and insights in the development of this paper. Special thanks to Dr. Scott Silverstone for his critical analysis and advice.

[2] William B. Quandt, lecture, 30 Nov 05, University of Virginia.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Former Israeli Foreign Minister Eban, personal correspondence to William Quandt, 26 Jul 1990.

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---. 2004a. Document #2. Telegram From the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State. Tel Aviv, May 15, 1967, 1920Z.

---. 2004b. Document #7. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson. Washington, May 17, 1967.

---. 2004c. Document #54. Memorandum for the Record. Washington, May 24, 1967, 12:35-1:25 p.m. SUBJECT: Record of National Security Council Meeting held on May 24, 1967 at 12 noon--Discussion of Middle East Crisis.

---. 2004d. Document #71. Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Johnson. Washington, May 26, 1967. SUBJECT: Your Conversation with the Israeli Foreign Minister.

---. 2004e. Document #140. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel. Washington, June 4, 1967, 2:03 p.m.

---. 2004f. Document #101. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson in Texas. Washington, May 30, 1967, 2038Z.

---. 2004g. Document #53. Memorandum of Conversation. Washington, May 24, 1967, 11-11:40 a.m.

---. 2004h. Document #22. Editorial Note. President Johnson meeting from 5:38 to 6:59 p.m. on May 19, 1967, with Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of Defense McNamara, Special Assistant to the President Walt Rostow, and White House Press Secretary George Christian. (Johnson Library, President's Daily Diary)

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