

Walworth Barbour, Oral History Interview – 5/22/1981
Administrative Information

Creator: Walworth Barbour
Interviewer: Sheldon M. Stern
Date of Interview: May 22, 1981
Place of Interview: Gloucester, M.A.
Length: 34 pages

Biographical Note

Barbour, Ambassador to Israel from 1961 to 1973, discusses U.S.-Israeli relations during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, including negotiations about Palestinian refugees, military aid, and nuclear proliferation, among other issues.

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Walworth Barbour, recorded interview by Sheldon M. Stern, May 22, 1981, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Walworth Barbour

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Oral History Interview

With

Ambassador Walworth Barbour

by Sheldon M. Stern

May 22, 1981
Gloucester, Massachusetts

For the Kennedy Library Oral History Project

STERN: I wonder if you could begin by talking a bit about the background of your appointment as Ambassador to Israel in 1970¹, how that came about.

BARBOUR: Yeah, that's very simple and not very mysterious. I was a minister in London where I had been since 1955. And the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] Administration came in. They wanted to change the Assistant Secretary of Middle Eastern Affairs, who had previously served in London. And he was a regular friend of mine, but he suggested that he would like to go back to London in the position I was holding. So the administration had to find some place to put me. And it was first suggested that I go to Ceylon, which is no secret now, which I didn't like for several reasons, particularly since I have suffered from asthma all my life off and on, and Ceylon is a hell of a place for anybody who didn't like the tropics. Also, I knew nothing about the Far East. So then, as an alternative, Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles], who was then under secretary of state ...

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: ...suggested that I go to Israel which was open because Brownie Reid, Ogden

¹ Barbour was Ambassador to Israel from 1961 to 1973.

Reid [Ogden R. Reid],

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had been a political appointee under the Republicans, and he had resigned in January before the Kennedy Administration took over. So I went to Tel Aviv. There was nothing more mysterious about it than that.

STERN: And when did you actually arrive?

BARBOUR: June 6th. I stayed in London with David Bruce [David K. E. Bruce], who's an old friend of mine, who was the new ambassador for about three months, partially to assist in a gentle transition, but also because, you may remember that President Kennedy made a visit to London and Europe...

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: ...the first couple of days of June, something or other, and David Bruce thought it'd be useful if I could stay that long. And actually, I think Kennedy, President's visit finished on the 5th of June and I left for Tel Aviv on the 6th.

STERN: How did you assess, upon your arrival, the state of U.S.-Israeli relations at that time?

BARBOUR: Well, I don't think there's any great mystery about that. The state of U.S.-Israeli relations was very, at a very low ebb. I wouldn't say bad because fundamentally the Israelis have always recognized that their relationship with the United States was of major importance no matter what happened, and that we were fundamentally their best friend. However, these relations on the surface and in fact had been severely strained by an attitude which could be variously described, but was anything but glorious, towards the Middle East during the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration and during the Suez crisis where we succeeded, without much difficulty, in getting ourselves on the same side of the fence as the Russians for different purposes, but both for the purpose of currying favor with Nasser [Gamal Abdel Nasser], and at the same time divorcing ourselves from all our allies, major allies, Britain and France, much to the dismay of everybody. Of course, further factor in the Israeli situation was that the French, and to some extent but to a lesser extent, the British, were at that time the principle supplier to Israel of military supplies and arms.

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: The French had some ____ and some _____. ____ was not a very good plane but it was the best that the Israelis could get. So, apparently they got some Mirages. And the British were supplying or had supplied, I don't

think in most recent times, but in 1961 they were producing any, giving them any new ones, but they had a lot of Centurion tanks, whereas we wouldn't give them the time of day in the military field. So that was one of several, one of the backgrounds of difficulties between the two countries. However, more symptomatic of our general attitude of the Eisenhower Administration and Mr. Dulles [John Foster Dulles] in particular, to the effect that for some reason, reason was to try to placate Nasser, that Israel didn't need to defend itself against Egyptian attacks, and should lie down and roll over. It was prior to, as it was during the whole period there were sniping attacks from Egypt. So the atmosphere when I got there was friendly underneath, fundamentally...

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: ... but around the surface not very happy.

STERN: Just a few months before your arrival, there had been the eruption of a serious issue between the United States and Israel which was the discovery of this nuclear reactor in the desert at Dimona. And I'm sure you're aware of this very heated meeting between Ambassador Reid and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion [David Ben-Gurion] which was on the third of January, 1961, in which, according to a number of reports, Reid essentially delivered an ultimatum to Ben-Gurion demanding to know what the reactor was for, what the Israeli plans were.

BARBOUR: Well, I wasn't sure, aware of any specific demands that was made by Reid. Obviously....

STERN: But that was a major issue. I wonder how that impacted on your arrival....

BARBOUR: Well, that impacted quite a lot because it was the French who had given the Israelis the reactor in Dimona.

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: And when we tried to express concern in line with our general policy of avoiding nuclear proliferation, the answer from the Israelis was, "Well, this isn't your business. You don't have anything to do with it. The French gave it to us, so whoa." The difficulty, from our standpoint, on "the inspections," quote unquote, was that the French were down there all the time looking it over. In fact they signed this without _____ whereas we had considerable difficulty making arrangements for periodic visits which was a window-dressing exercise. The Israelis tried to be as forthcoming, or to appear as forthcoming

as possible, at the same time without revealing anything to us. This winning them and dining them and taking them down there with, under great secrecy, sometimes even meeting them at the airport when they arrived, and taking them off the plane, and over around the back, and then clearing them through customs with Russian names and so forth, [Laughs] it was all a very unrealistic exercise which went on for many, many years and then finally just petered out when even the United States realized it wasn't getting anywhere. And it became ridiculous. The mystery as to how to make, if there ever was for a scientist, any mystery about making an atom bomb had long since dissipated and everybody wanted to make one. There's one question, whether you're gonna spend the money to do it and whether you had the facilities to get the enriched fuel.

STERN: Mm.

BARBOUR: But facilities might even make, I mean making the enriched fuel or getting it from somebody else under the table somewhere, but.... So that just, that issue wasn't narrative because it was another indication that the French being helpful and the United States sitting on its hands.

STERN: I know that before President Kennedy met with Ben-Gurion during those informal meetings before his departure for the trip to Europe, that there was at least a preliminary American inspection. And Kennedy told Ben-Gurion that, this was in New York, in the last, I guess it was the very end of May ...

BARBOUR: In the Waldorf-Astoria.

STERN: ... that's right, the famous Waldorf-Astoria meeting, that he told Ben-Gurion that the American scientists were satisfied that the reactor was for peaceful purposes.

BARBOUR: They usually said they were.

STERN: But yet it's very clear to me from all the State Department material that I went through that they were not really satisfied, were very suspicious and concerned. It went on for over two years ...

BARBOUR: ____.

STERN: ...in terms of trying to get a real handle on what was happening.

BARBOUR: Well, that's true. The scientists never issued a really negative report. Whatever they saw was peaceful, no

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question about that. But there was a lot of peaceful activities going on down there. I think they said they had 24 different outlets under the reactor where you could do experiments. And most of them, all of them or probably all of them at the time that the scientists were there, were working on some reasonable peaceful exercise. As I say, I have no reason to believe that the Israelis were making any atomic bombs. It wasn't a mystery. They didn't have to make any experiments to find out how to do it. The scientists knew how to do it. And it was always regarded by the Israelis that what the atomic bomb was is a kind of a useless weapon as far as they were concerned. The atomic bomb is devastating in a confined area, pretty devastating anywhere. But from a military standpoint, using it in the desert with sand is probably the least effective place you could use an atomic bomb, and they never had any serious intent to use it on a population center. And I know that they, therefore, were not very anxious to make one. But it certainly does make the expenditure which was a necessity.

STERN: I found a good deal of evidence that the United States made tremendous effort from '61 to '63 to find out just where the Israelis were getting their uranium and eventually zeroed in on France, South Africa and Argentina. And the actual agreement, as far as regular U.S. visits to inspect, did not really come until Eshkol [Levi Eshkol] became prime minister. It began in about 1964.

BARBOUR: I think that's probably true, yeah. I don't know what kind of a.... Talk about actual agreements, because an awful lot of stuff was done orally. I don't know if there was ever anything written about Eshkol, about regular visits. And Eshkol didn't like writing things down much, particularly things which could be used against him politically in his own country, if they surfaced, which he was always afraid they would. He would much prefer to do them orally.

STERN: When Kennedy met with Ben-Gurion at the Waldorf-Astoria, there were basically two things that Ben-Gurion asked. One was for a United States-Soviet territorial guarantee in the Middle East, which as far as I can see, the U.S. never took very seriously for a number of rather obvious reasons.

BARBOUR: No they couldn't. That was not realistic anyway.

STERN: I wonder if you could speculate as to why he asked for it if it was not very realistic. I mean, I wonder if there might have been some....

BARBOUR: I don't think there was anything very concrete, but BG [Ben-Gurion] had a very complex mental apparatus. It

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was very practical one the one side, on the one hand. And he was a pretty shrewd calculator as to the likelihood of military aggression by the Arab against Israel, and a

necessity for concentrating on that part of Israeli defense. But in the political or human relations broader aspects area, he had some, I don't know if it was exactly wishful thinking, but some kind of abstruse theories was related to quite a lot of places. Perhaps it was his upbringing. Then he had a feeling that the Russians were not all bad, and there was some elements, perhaps, which could be prevailed upon to make them reasonable instead of only reasoning animals. Or, perhaps he was doing it to try to put the Russians on the spot, if we would play along with an offer, which was too sophisticated for us. But I recall, so he had the same kind of mental aberrations about China at that time we used to think. He went on a trip to Scandinavia. And two professors, he thought one was an American but he turned out to be British, gave him two books to read on the airplane, on China. And ever since then he used to come on, "Why didn't the United States make some sort of gestures or overtures towards China." Every time I would go up to see him on any old subject, didn't make any difference what, he would get back to this Chinese business which at that time was entirely unrealistic. And I think that's a long way around to answer your question as to why he would suggest a joint American-Soviet approach to something.

STERN: I see what you're getting at, though. The other thing that he raised was the, of course, the question of the Hawk missiles ...

BARBOUR: Oh, he got those.

STERN: ... which he got eventually.

BARBOUR: He got them at that meeting.

STERN: No. Not in '61. He didn't get them until '62.

BARBOUR: He got them at the ____.

STERN: Excuse me?

BARBOUR: He got it from Kennedy.

STERN: He got them from Kennedy. That's right. But in '6____, at the Waldorf-Astoria meeting, Kennedy said, "No," and that the United States would re-evaluate the question later on. And they....

BARBOUR: Well, in the interest of timing was right, though.

STERN: Well, we'll get back to that one. I want to ask you

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about another thing which was the issue of Israeli passage through the Suez

Canal. I found an interesting number of things on that. Apparently, the Democrats had put it in their 1960 platform, which Chester Bowles had been involved in, and then Israel had tried to get the U.S. to back U.N. resolutions on free passage through the Suez, and then the impending Kennedy Administration was cautious about that.

BARBOUR: That was in the armistice agreements as was a whole other lot of things in access to the east side of Jerusalem which were never carried out by the Arabs. And the acts of the free passage of the Suez Canal was not only symbolic, but it was a practical matter from the standpoint of the Israelis because of the importance of the Lark, reportedly the Lark ...

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: ... to travel in commercial traffic to the Far East.

STERN: Why do you feel the United States was so hesitant at that point to take a stand on that issue? The Israelis apparently were very disappointed.

BARBOUR: Well the same thing ____ in to Nasser. Nasser wasn't going to do it unless we had a head-on collision with him. We were not in good enough shape even had we wanted to have a head-on collision with him, for obvious reasons. But the fundamental, and chronologically the first, one was the unfortunate manner in which Dulles conveyed to him our turndown on the Aswan Dam. The turndown was obvious, because in the first place Eden [Anthony Eden] had told Mr. Dulles that he couldn't put the issue before his parliament at that point. And also Nasser had rejected the political conditions which were attached to our offer on the Aswan Dam. But the unfortunate way he called him Master of Sand just tells him all bets are off. That was the first slap of Nasser that we made, and then from there on, Mr. Dulles was trying to climb back into the good graces of Nasser before the Soviets took over with their Czechoslovak arms deal.

STERN: Yeah. Apparently our President Kennedy, in a sense, had the same interest, and he did exchange letters with Nasser and the leaders of the other Arab States in his first months in office, which apparently, as far as I could tell, he did not tell the Israelis about. And then the Israelis found out when Nasser released part of the letter to the press. Do you have any recollection of their reaction to that?

BARBOUR: No. I don't particularly recall that. There were a lot of things happening at that time and that certainly didn't make a great stir.

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STERN: The next issue that I'd like to turn to, which I think is in the long run obviously one of great importance but that at time didn't get very far, which

is the whole question of the refugee issue and the so-called "Johnson Plan," Dr. Joseph Johnson [Joseph E. Johnson] of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace...

BARBOUR: Yeah.

STERN: ... who drew up this plan in 1961 by which the refugees....

BARBOUR: It took him quite a long while.

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: He started in 1961. He was working on it for a long while, yeah.

STERN: And apparently there were some serious, there were serious efforts on the part of the United States to get Israel to endorse this including the Myer Feldman diplomatic mission in the summer of 1962 about which I wonder if I might ask you some questions. The basic question, of course, involved in the Johnson Plan, was the so-called issue of "free choice." I put that in quotes.

BARBOUR: Well, that's half of it you know.

STERN: Well, if you could elaborate on your perception of that whole thing.

BARBOUR: Well, the so-called plan as finally formulated was very complex business. The two issues that were uppermost were the freedom of choice for the refugees. And the freedom of choice, of course, involved Israeli agreement to the second part which became more important, not more important, but equally important, how many refugees would Israel take back?

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: Now there were exchanges and all sorts of fora and contacts. And Joe Johnson made several trips to Israel and several trips all over. And there never was anything very much written down about it. The only thing that.... Closest the Israelis ever came, I think, to agreeing to take back a specific number was at a meeting with me in Jerusalem with BG presiding. Mrs. Meir [Golda Meir] sitting on his left, and I was sitting on his right and a whole lot of people around, when he pretty much intimated, though even he could be vague if he wanted to, but the idea was clear that they would take back,

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under suitable circumstances that the rest of it went through, 150,000.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: And I remember well Golda stiffened at this vague reference to a figure which went against her grain. But she, dutiful foreign minister, she didn't say anything. She didn't oppose the prime minister in my presence, anyway.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: That was the closest we ever came to that. And now when you talk here about the Mike Feldman visit, I think Mike talked about it, but it wasn't any diplomatic mission that he ever had. Mike is a very good friend of mine, and I knew what was going on, and he.... This was the big issue at that point ...

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: ... so anytime anybody talked, anybody with any official standing and, of course, Mike was Kennedy's Jewish expert as well as some other jobs in the...

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: ... in the White house. That was described perhaps by some of my colleagues in the Arab countries as being a diplomatic mission or something, but it never was. What had been planned has finally formulated, was so complicated as to be entirely unworkable.

STERN: Can you be more specific as to why you think it was unworkable?

BARBOUR: Yeah. Exactly. And I know exactly where it was killed. It was killed in the Cabinet Room in the White House. They had a meeting with President Kennedy. Dean Rusk on his right and me on his left, Phil Talbot [Phillips Talbot], some guy from, whose name I can't remember; I can see him.

STERN: You remember more or less the date of this meeting?

BARBOUR: Well, I was home obviously, and I think I was here vacationing or something. I don't know if I was called back specifically for this meeting.

STERN: Mm-hmm. Was it '62?

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BARBOUR: Probably, must have been. When Joe Johnson, sitting across the table, outlined what was involved and talked about lining up the refugees and

giving them pieces of paper to decide, "Do you want to stay here? Do you want to go over to be resettled somewhere else?" Actually, the only other place we had, had ever agreed, as far as I know, to take any, was Brazil. Joe was also trying to find other countries that would accept some. And, of course, for obvious reasons, if they opted to go somewhere else in the face of Arab pressures, to remain refugees, they had to be protected immediately and carted off to some secure place without getting their families running because they couldn't get back or they'd get killed in the camps. And I remember one remark was made, "But this was going to take an awful lot of Swiss, and I think we're just about out of Swiss that can do this." And anyway, the discussion went around and everybody made some comments. And finally Kennedy said, "Well," he said, "how much is this going to cost?" And Joe said, "I'll estimate it'll cost about a billion five," a billion and a half dollars, which in 1962 was a lot of money; it isn't so much now. But that didn't seem to rock the President too much because he came back and he said, "Well, gentlemen, that's all right. It's a lot of money, but I don't mind a fight either getting this through Congress. It's a fight I'm prepared to accept. But can anyone of you people around the table tell me that I have any chance of winning this fight, that we can get this, this will work? That even if I win the fight in Congress that it'll work?" And there was no word. Nobody would.... The President stood up and said, "Gentlemen, I'm afraid that's your answer." And that busted up the refugee plan for good and all. It was just too complex. It wasn't any question of anybody torpedoing it, but we just couldn't adopt it.

STERN: Mm. Yeah, now Feldman, in his oral history, says that Kennedy was very suspicious of the whole free choice idea ...

BARBOUR: Well, obviously he didn't think it would work.

STERN: ... that the Israelis could never accept it. Right.

BARBOUR: They didn't think it would work. And even if the Israelis wouldn't accept it, the alternative would be to get a whole lot of other countries to accept them. And as far as I remember, all we had was Brazil, and I don't think they're going to take any half a million or something.

STERN: I wonder if you could comment on one additional thing. Now, Feldman claims in his oral history, when he went to Israel in the summer of '62, that he got a tentative agreement from Golda Meir and Ben-Gurion on Israel taking back ten percent of the refugees.

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BARBOUR: Yeah, but they didn't. Nobody had then figured out what the total number of refugees was.

STERN: That's right. And then he said that when he went back to the United States in September, when Golda Meir came to the opening of the United Nations

General Assembly in New York, she then called him and told him that all agreements were off because she felt, she learned that the plan had been changed by the State Department and made more favorable to the Arabs, and that the Israelis felt that they had been betrayed.

BARBOUR: ____ exactly the....

STERN: I wonder what your recollection is at that.

BARBOUR: Well, I think that did happen as a matter of fact, that they were changing around all the time because of.... Joe Johnson didn't have the agreement of anybody on either side. But I think it's an exaggeration for Mike to say there was an actual agreement by the Israelis. They were talking in terms, she was talking in terms of ten percent. As I say, BG told me 150,000 which might have been the same thing or _____. But it was changing all the time. There was some.... Another thing that was changed was a suggested U.N. resolution in which we definitely did go back on our word to Golda. So we had an agreement from her on.... She wanted to eliminate a paragraph, so-called paragraph eleven, and we agreed to do it. But then they couldn't sell it to the Arabs. So the next time she saw the darn draft, the paragraph she didn't want in it was up in the preamble. It wasn't in the, it was, left the change. And she said, "No, I can't agree to this. I told you I agreed to this thing without change." And she could be very positive character.

STERN: I have a, just as a matter of fact since you mentioned that, I found a memo of a meeting on July 11, 1961 which is about a month after you came to Israel. It's a memo that you wrote to Secretary Rusk in which you discussed a meeting with Golda Meir about the refugees, and the fact that she had said that you felt that she was very unsatisfactory in her response, and that she had asserted that twelve percent of Israel was already Arab and that they felt that there were insufficient safeguards for Israel in this kind of plan. And then she said that Israel was always willing to sit down and negotiate directly with the Arabs, something which I find ____ constantly. I wondered what your response was to that because I sort of had the feeling that this direct negotiations offer is really a kind of a ploy because they knew they wouldn't get it and therefore it was safe to offer. And it always made them appear very flexible.

BARBOUR: No, I think that, no. On the contrary.

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STERN: No, you'd want them to think....

BARBOUR: I would say not because the direct negotiations had a advantage for Israel per se. You see, Israel's fundamental effort at that time, and unfortunately there is still a lot of vestiges of it now at this late date, was to accept, to achieve international acceptance as a sovereign state and this would be direct negotiations, sitting down at a table with the Arabs. It would be a very great feather in their cap on that ...

STERN: Correct.

BARBOUR: ... line. I think they really put a ____ Whether she was naive enough to think that she was gonna be able to persuade the Arabs to do it.... She was rarely naive so I'm inclined to think that probably in that sense it was a ploy, that she was not overly optimistic that she could get it.

STERN: Right. On the Hawk missiles, which according to Feldman, Israel finally got in the summer of '62. Well, I shouldn't say that, that is, they got a pledge to get in the summer of '62, but there was a long period before they could actually be delivered and made operational. Did you find that that helped to, how do I put it...

BARBOUR: Well, yeah.

STERN: ...unstick U.S. relations with Israel?

BARBOUR: They were a symbolic gesture. A Hawk missile was not the most satisfactory missile. It's not ballistic to begin with; it's a guided effect. Got an awful lot of wires attached to it and.... But it was symbolic that we had at least broken away from our refusal to make any military hardware available to the Israelis to the effect that we are now at least supplying them with what we call defensive missiles, defensive weapons.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: I don't know exactly when they were received.

STERN: It was not until the Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] administration, actually.

BARBOUR: I think so. But I remember first seeing them on parade, was at the National Day when they held it in Haifa. First, it got so darned windy and dusty that my asthma attack was about to come on, so I left and went up to the hotel, much to the consternation of everybody who didn't know why the American ambassador was walking off, but it was quite simple.

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It was too darned windy and dusty. The Hawk missiles were paraded then. As far as you said, mentioned the word "being operational," first time they fired one, the damned thing fizzled. And we had seven vice-presidents of Raytheon showed up in about three days to find out why it didn't go. It turned out that there was a little rubber business some place and that it had dried up in the heat and so there was no compression so it only went a few yards and fell down. Gosh, that was ____ years later.

STERN: I wonder if you might have any recollection of this. There was a memo stated October 5, 1962 which you wrote to Secretary Rusk, rather long, about two pages, in which you expressed concern that, quote, "The young Mapai generals," and you named Dayan [Moshe Dayan], Peres [Shimon Peres] and others, "convinced...."

BARBOUR: Peres was never a general.

STERN: Oh, really?

BARBOUR: No.

STERN: Well, anyway you did mention him. Maybe I'm compressing....

BARBOUR: The director-general of foreign defense ministry.

STERN: Convinced that Israeli security can be assured only by a total military victory and a dictated peace, that they feel that Israel was cheated out of this result in 1956 due to outside interference. And you felt that although this was a minority view, circumstances could transform it into a national policy. How serious did you really think that was at that point once it's....

BARBOUR: Well, they carried a lot of weight, those people. And in retrospect now, it's clearer that there was a much more of a difference of opinion among the various Israeli authorities of people in public life on that issue than I thought there was at that time and though ...

STERN: Mm-hmm. That's interesting.

BARBOUR: ... admittedly I was only referring to the younger ones. Seems unusual nowadays to refer to Peres and Dayan as the younger. But, I guess the time has past. They were then, compared to BG they were. But actually, the person who felt, I now know, who felt strongest about total victory and a dictated peace, in other words, who will have the least confidence in negotiated or mediated peace in which their so-called allies or friends were involved, was BG himself.

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STERN: Why, that's interesting.

BARBOUR: And he was the one who was always raising the red flag, to the effect that all these border raids by the Arabs were a test as to how much they could get away with the Israeli defense forces. And, therefore, he was largely in favor of the reprisals against the wishes of some of his other higher-ups.

STERN: That's an interesting point and perhaps you could pursue that because I found a lot of material about the I mean there were incidents with Syria, by the Sea of Galilee, some shooting of some Israelis that were farming, etc., and constant pressure from the State Department to get the Israelis to go to the U.N. and not to take military action. And yet the Israelis almost always did take military action. Found one case where they were satisfied with Stevenson's [Adlai E. Stevenson] responses at the U.N., and they did not act. But apparently they did not have great confidence in the U.N. which was, the validity of which was borne out, yes. [Laughter] And so, I think, this whole strategy of military retaliation was much more effective and, of course, to a degree they still do.

BARBOUR: Well, yeah. I was the instrument of trying to persuade them not to do that most of the time. Of course, I was never in a position to know in advance when they were going to pull off a raid or something. That would have been silly on their part to let me know because it would inevitably invite a protest. But also, I discovered that, I'm now aware that a lot of other people even in the Israeli government were not aware that half of these retaliatory raids were pulled off by the military.

STERN: You mean essentially on their own?

BARBOUR: Yeah. The coordination was very bad, particularly when Sharett [Moshe Sharett] was prime minister for that period. But this is going back before the time we're talking about ...

STERN: That's right, right.

BARBOUR: ... but Dayan and then chief-of-staff, I'm talking about an earlier period now, but ...

STERN: Can we just pause for one second?

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

STERN: Okay.

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BARBOUR: ... and there still was not too much, as much coordination as there should have been even in the, when BG came back to be prime minister. The military frequently went off on their own and frequently this clashed and was very bad timing as far as the foreign relations were concerned.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: Of course there was the famous Lanvin(?) affair, but that was also back long before the Kennedy years.

STERN: Right, right.

BARBOUR: That was a great example of non-cooperation between, at that time of, between the foreign office and the military. BG got it pretty well under control. And on the retaliation, and on the raids and retaliation, of course, part of the raids and retaliations were.... The approximate cause was the existence of these demilitarized zones, extend from the armistice agreements of '49. Those were ridiculous enclaves. "The shepherds" quote/unquote, was supposed to be allowed to go down there, but on the Syrian front the shepherds were all military. They got a few sheep and goats around to push ahead of them or something. And inasmuch as the area between Damascus and the Golan Heights was completely closed by the Syrians to anybody except the military, by definition they were military, and they sure were. They could bring out some big-size guns and artillery and fire a gun on one of the Israeli settlements from the so-called demilitarized zone. And the Syrians had the Heights everywhere except one place, advantage of height over the Israelis which was.... One place was "The Basketball Court," as they called it, down east of the southern end of Lake Tiberius. On that the Israelis had the advantage. But the policy....[Phone rings] Is this on now?

STERN: Yes.

BARBOUR: Well our private policy.... Of course our principal objection to, aside from our general concern, is usually is to minimize hostilities, trying to keep as few pots boiling as we can, was that we estimated the Israelis were over-retaliating, over-reacting, and in some cases, the Israelis more or less, well I guess readily admitted that they, things worked out that way. They didn't, they claimed that the plan for the reprisal, retaliation was reasonable in most cases, but that the uncertainties of military operations sometimes expanded and it's more difficult, as we've discovered on many occasions, and I'm not a military man, but anybody will tell you to get out there just to get in. And once they took off, sometimes if they met resistance, then they would have to put in

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some more stuff in order to get the first ones out. But I don't know. In the end I'm inclined to think nowadays that history has shown that perhaps their reprisal-retaliation policy was more justified and more useful than we thought at that time.

STERN: Why do you think that?

BARBOUR: Well, when the question was, "Was Nassar really trying to, in his case the Egyptian ____ and more of the rest of the Arabs, trying to work up to a situation where they thought they could defeat Israel and wipe it off the map, in which case they would attack en masse, or were they trying to defend themselves by

keeping the Israelis off balance and to prevent an Israeli attack?" Well, I think history has definitely shown that it was the former policy, that they were borrowing for time, the Arabs, until they could build themselves up as the Six Day War demonstrated, to a point where they thought they could wipe Israel off the map, in which case Israel's efforts, once it was to push them back has shown that it was still alive, probably had a good effect on keeping them for that reason for that period. Certainly the Syrians, that is, read "Russians and Syria," were spoiling for a final push. Of course it came after my time in '73, but in '67, the war was initiated by Nasser and his business, but the others went in with him, Hussein [King Hussein I of Jordan] reluctantly, but the poor fellow, on the spot, whatever he did was wrong. And....

STERN: I'm curious about your reaction to one other thing which is related to this in a way. The Israelis constantly were introducing, during the Kennedy period, at the U.N. something called the Direct Negotiations Resolution and the Brazzaville Resolution ...

BARBOUR: Oh, that silly thing.

STERN: ... and I know that the State Department was not very happy with that.

BARBOUR: Neither were the Israelis, neither was anybody. The author of that was that nutty priest, the Frenchman and the French Congo, Brazzaville ...

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: ... who was more Zionist than Herzl [Theodor Herzl] was, as far as that's concerned, for some unknown reason.

STERN: Who is this exactly?

BARBOUR: I forget his name. He's a French priest, was president

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of French Congo when they split up, and Brazzaville, that's the capital, Brazzaville.

STERN: Right, right.

BARBOUR: He was eventually assassinated, they think. And he produced this Brazzaville Resolution which we didn't like and _____ didn't like. It didn't look realistic, I mean.... But we both came to the conclusion that we couldn't very well oppose it. It was in favor of virtue and against sin on the surface as far as that's concerned. And so we elected, bought the thing and went along with it through the United Nations. Obviously that's when it happened.

STERN: _____

BARBOUR: That is now a little shattering incident.

STERN: I wonder how you would react to this. In November of '62, which is a month before Golda Meir met with Kennedy in Florida, there was a so-called Scope paper put out in the State Department which basically is very critical of Israel. It said that basically the United States had satisfied Israeli concerns by (a) supplying the Hawk, by (b) cooperating on the diversion of water from Jordan, by (c) providing more economic aid, and by (d) making a commitment to Israeli security. But that, on the other hand, Israel had not reciprocated, and that the State Department was very angry at the Israelis for its efforts, they said, to undermine U.N. peace-keeping role, its intransigence on refugees, its constant use of the Brazzaville Resolution which the United States thought to be unrealistic, and its retaliation policy to these raids. This total memo suggests to me that U.S. relations with Israel vis-à-vis the State Department, at least, were not very good at this point.

BARBOUR: I'm afraid, and I'm sorry to put it down here historically, but I think it has to be said, and I don't believe there's any use in overlooking it and trying to shove it under the rug. That paper manifestly was drafted by the so-called "Arabists" in the State Department; they have been called that. Some of them were not really. Some of them genuinely misguided; some of them were intentionally misguided. And in any case, they came up with an awful lot of nonsense that goes way back to the Wallace Murray [Wallace S. Murray] times in the State Department. We didn't really get rid of them until the late, and very much lamented, Roger Davis was deputy assistant secretary, when he made a serious effort to. In fact, he made it a policy when anybody was assigned to the Middle East division, was hostile, that they believed they could be objective in the Israel-Arab dispute. And if they said not, and we told them if they said not, "We don't want you here but it won't appear on

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your record anywhere." And quite a lot of them we weeded out. Oh, we had a lot of mat analysis, as you set it forth just now, is very weak in that paper. We hadn't satisfied them on any of those first things that they say satisfied them, even the Hawks which is defensive missile which is not what they needed. They needed something they could protect themselves with and that's what they were asking for. We gave them more of economic aid but not much more and that, I guess, resistance. Of course there's no harm in resisting if you've got any grounds for it. When somebody wants to raise the ante on you, you got to put out more money as far as that's concerned. But we didn't satisfy them. You can never satisfy anybody if they're looking for money as far as that goes. And the other points I think of equally....

STERN: Can you specify which people in the State Department you thought were on this development?

BARBOUR: It was not one or two. It went through a whole rigmarole. Part of it....

STERN: Would Talbot, Phillips Talbot and William Crawford [William A. Crawford] be among them?

BARBOUR: No. Those two not particularly.

STERN: No.

BARBOUR: I would say not, either of them. There wasn't specific individuals as much as general atmosphere it generated. If something came in they were inclined to take the Arab side. Not Phil Talbot or Bill Crawford. There were two Crawfords; one was a Soviet expert and had nothing to do with it, but No, I don't think that was correct.

STERN: In December of '62, Golda Meir met with Kennedy in Palm Beach.

BARBOUR: It's off Palm Beach. It's Harriman's [William Averell Harriman] house.

STERN: Well, anyway it was in Florida. And....

BARBOUR: Boca Grande isn't it? I don't know. Just one of those ...

STERN: I think it was....

BARBOUR: ... sea islands in Georgia.

STERN: In any case, she came out of that meeting with the belief that he had essentially made a promise to

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defend Israeli security in the event of aggression by the Arabs.

BARBOUR: I think he had.

STERN: Well, that's just what I'm interested in, whether you felt that he had made that and if you talked to her before or after the meeting and what response....

BARBOUR: No, she came from New York.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: I wasn't over here.

STERN: Oh, OK. I didn't know....

BARBOUR: But I know that she went down there, haven't heard, seen her subsequently. She went down with great misgivings.

STERN: Why was that?

BARBOUR: Oh, because she didn't know what was going to happen. And she came back quite happy cause.... Of course, the truth of the matter is it was a little laden, but they say we never gave Israel a written guarantee, security guarantee, which is true. It was never written, except later it was contained in a lot of letters which are not public documents in this sense, between Johnson and Eshkol and, I think, Golda and some other people and so forth, which constituted the security guarantee, and it was inevitable anyway. I mean it was only President Kennedy stating the facts. But with the political situation in this country which people seem to think is something wrong with, or something indecent or improper about it, although it seems to me quite proper, but the influence the Jews have in the American political scene is unrealistic to think that any attack on Israel would go unanswered by the United States. So in that case, the presence of the United States took reflecting on the facts of life. As a matter, I don't see anything improper about it but Jews are a group and like the ____ this United States is not made up of a homogenous bunch of WASPs or whatever it is. In fact, the WASPs are about the smallest minority. But everybody seems to think that Jewish influence in politics, American politics, is something wrong about it. I don't know what is wrong about it. But with that existing and that factor, 'cause usually it's shoved under the table whenever you mention, it's unrealistic to think that the President could get away with it doing anything else.

STERN: That's an interesting point because if the Arabs

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indeed, as you indicated before, were actually waiting for time on the theory that they could eventually attack and wipe out Israel. That always struck me as being somewhat unrealistic because I don't think politically it could happen in terms of the United States.

BARBOUR: Oh, it couldn't.

STERN: Despite the Soviet Union.

BARBOUR: No ...

STERN: Of course it had the potential.

BARBOUR: ... the Soviets are not going to, the Soviets have never used troops anywhere where they couldn't walk back. It's still true. If they could fly them in, but

the question is, how to get them out? Afghanistan they can walk in and walk back if they want to. And to our misfortune in several cases, we haven't been inhibited by that consideration.

STERN: I wonder if we could talk a bit about your relationship with some of these Israeli leaders. There were a number of memos about meetings with various people....

BARBOUR: Oh, my goodness. I met the whole time.

STERN: I thought this one was kind of interesting. You met in January of 1962 with Golda Meir, and the subject under discussion was the pressure that the U.S. was putting on foreign governments to prevent them from establishing diplomatic missions in Jerusalem. And she was particularly upset because she felt the United States had prevented Liberia from establishing a mission in Jerusalem, and she wanted the U.S. to stop this kind of pressure, and apparently your reaction was that the United States supported the United States', the U.N. rather, resolution on Jerusalem. And then she said, "Well then, why don't you stand behind the U.N. resolution on free transit through the Suez Canal?"

BARBOUR: She was probably right. [Laughter] I don't happen to recall that particular conversation but it sounds typical.

STERN: What kind of a relationship did you have with her, and what kind of a foreign minister did you think she was?

BARBOUR: She became one of our greatest friends, she's a very wonderful woman. And we had some conversations in the early days, and which perhaps were not heated, we could not get very heated, though were positive on both sides.

But she

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was a very powerful character. I would not say that she was the world's most flexible individual. The history of her own situation was warranted, and her dedication to the state of Israel naturally tended to crystallize her points of view on very many issues. She never forget her contention that she was the interpreter for the Israelis of the American position of, due to her, she wasn't born in this country, but she came here when she was eight years old. And I remember she once said when the director general of the foreign office came over and had a very fine tour, was taken up to colleges and so forth, but nevertheless he came back very enthusiastic. And she turned to him at one meeting and said, "I thought I was supposed to be the one that interpreted the United States, not you." [Laughter] Anyway.... And of course there was the famous occasion, she made it famous because it was "four eyes" as far as I was concerned, it was an expression the Israelis used _____. She spread it all over the place. She liked the story. She was, as had been her habit, trying to tell us what was wrong with what we

were doing. I've forgotten the subject of that, doesn't make any difference. And I got a little annoyed. So I said something to the effect, she made it, embellished quite a lot in her native speeches, but something to the effect that we had done Israel a favor of recognizing Israel as an independent sovereign state with a right to make its own decisions. Would it be too much to ask if she would, if she and Israel would do the same thing for the United States, which took her back a little bit, but she used to tell the story with great relish afterwards. Like I say, she became a great friend.

STERN : What was her relationship with Ben-Gurion as you perceived it?

BARBOUR: I think it was admiration and respect, but there was no particular love lost. I don't think it was a very close relationship in that respect. She realized, as I think all the Israelis did, that BG was, _____ Dr. Weizmann [Chaim Weizmann], but in some respects a lot of them, believe most of them, Dr. Weizmann. I don't think that's true, but the founder of the modern state of Israel. BG was never a very lovable character. He had no sense of humor whatsoever. He was cordial and courteous most of the time, at least with foreigners, but I don't know that he was all the time with Israelis. And Golda and he clashed privately, quite frequently. But he was a great character. I think everybody that had anything to do with modern Israel must give him credit for a great deal. And, well, again he wasn't.... Actually Golda didn't have a great deal of sense of humor unless it was on a political subject; just a joke for joke's sake, she wouldn't laugh, couldn't see it or something or other. The....

STERN: What was your relationship like with the Israeli

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ambassador to the United States, Ambassador Harman [Avraham Harman]?

BARBOUR: Av Harman. Boy that was very close, very close. He's a very excellent fellow, and I see him now frequently. He came over here, saw him in Boston the other day. I think he's back again in this country, but now president of the Hebrew University as you know.

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: Going back to Golda, she actually came up here and visited us and my sister and I here in Gloucester. Caused consternation in one of the security forces of the little town. [Laughter] And Av's been out here frequently. He's a very jolly fellow. He was, of course, an Englishman to begin with, and an extremely able fellow.

STERN: You had a meeting with him, I was curious about whether you remember this, because I think it suggests something. This was in May of '62 when you were talking about, perhaps the Israelis being oversensitive on security questions, and Harman admitted that Israelis may be at times too emotional, but he said that

this reaction was that of a small state which was surrounded by enemies. He then asked you, "Why was the United States so emotional about Castro [Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz] when the dangers were much less," which I thought was kind of an interesting response and....

BARBOUR: Yes. But it has its points. It's not too stupid.

STERN: No, not at all.

BARBOUR: 'Course what I was getting at, I suppose, was the sensitivity which, in '62 I hadn't been there very long, but is a characteristic which is now expressed by, frequently about Jews in general and the Israelis in particular, was also quoted again, I remember, by Av Harman at a lunch the other day, that Jews just like everybody else only more so [laughter], which is the same thing. They were oversensitive. They feel.... But, of course it is true that Israel is a small country and he was quite right on that.

STERN: Did you have much of a relationship with Mordechai Gazit towards the....

BARBOUR: Oh yeah, Mort Gazit, a very good friend of mine too. He was a junior officer most of that time though he became deputy director general of the foreign office before he went to Paris, I guess.

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STERN: Yes, that's right.

BARBOUR: I knew him really well. I don't think he went anywhere else. I know Paris was his last post.

STERN: He's been spending a lot of his time in the last year writing a book.

BARBOUR: I know. Digging up my telegrams

STERN: Yes. That's right. [Laughter]

BARBOUR: ... because he brought some out to his house a while ago while I was having dinner with him there. And we went into his office, or whatever he used as his office, and reading my telegrams to me [laughter], which is rather amusing in retrospect 'cause I obviously put it that way then, but I not sure whether I would have used the same expressions now. Actually, one of those which he was showing us, a meeting I mention earlier in this conversation when Golda, when BG mentioned 150,000 and Golda stiffened. Anyhow, he's a very able fellow and he's still an extremely young-looking man whether he has had a long career or he was one of the defenders of Jerusalem, captain of the defense corps of Jerusalem in the '48 war, but it doesn't look as if he was old enough to

be a, to have been. But he's a very good friend of the United States and extremely able person.

STERN: In June of '62, Shimon Peres visited Washington seeking military concessions from the United States--this was before the Hawk was granted--and was particularly, concern raised with the State Department, the fact that Egypt was getting MIG 21's from the Soviet Union ...

BARBOUR: I was going to say, not from the State Department.

STERN: ... and, right, but the State Department.... Again, the memos that I discovered after he left essentially said that they were very skeptical that he had exaggerated Egypt's strength. And there was a lot of material, as a matter of fact, about this whole question, were the Israelis constantly exaggerating what the Egyptians had in order to get more out of the United States. There was one issue in August of '62 where the CIA reported that Israel had leaked information to the columnist, Roscoe Drummond [James Roscoe Drummond], about the Soviet build-up in Egypt which the CIA felt had been exaggerated in order to get the United States to give them the Hawk missiles. Do you feel that this was the sort of thing the Israelis were likely to do or were there other examples of that kind of thing?

BARBOUR: Well, I wouldn't say they wouldn't exaggerate for the

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same reason that I referred to just a, conversation with Av Harman, because they saw it as a bigger threat perhaps than we did, and it was a bigger threat to them.

STERN: Right. There were also the German scientists in Egypt and

BARBOUR: Yeah.

STERN: ... chemical warfare, they felt, and that sort of thing.

BARBOUR: Yeah. But that was more emotional. The German scientists were not a serious issue as far as the Israelis were concerned, but their presence was known. That was enough to scare the Israelis quite a lot. I mean, to the Israeli public "scientist" was a bad name in those days and the Negev ____ and after the atom bomb was blown off scientists had a hard time getting respectable again. But that German scientist thing was not too serious. No, I don't think the Israelis were exaggerating in their talking about the Egyptian build-up. In fact, I think history will show that, on the contrary, they were factual. Their presentation was probably emotional and sounded exaggerated ...

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: ... but, I don't know. I don't think they exaggerated too much.

STERN: There was an incident in '62. I wonder what your recollections are of that, when there was a threat for a period of about a week to the stability of Jordan, and fear that Hussein would be overthrown, and Kennedy ordered the Sixth Fleet to move, etc., and they were.... There was a lot of material I've discovered which suggested that it was taken very seriously in Washington, particularly because it was feared that Israel would move into the West Bank if Hussein fell, and then Egypt would attack as a result of that. Did you ever own trying to calm the Israelis?

BARBOUR: I don't recall that.

STERN: You don't.

BARBOUR: Hussein's greatest success was his ability to survive which is no small achievement in the position he's in.

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STERN: Right, right. In May of '63, Ben-Gurion – this is of course in his last months in office – wrote what turned out to be a very important letter to Kennedy, in which he asked a United States commitment to match the arms that the USSR was giving Egypt, and also asked for a United States-Israel bilateral treaty, an actual written security agreement. And it took many months before the administration finally responded to that letter. As a matter of fact, by the time the response came, Ben-Gurion was no longer prime minister. But when it did come, the first week in October, Kennedy turned down the idea of a bilateral treaty, arguing that it really served no purpose, that he had already committed himself to Israeli security and that a written treaty would really not gain anything. But I found that a lot of material suggested that the Israelis were very ill at ease or nervous about this refusal and wondered whether Kennedy could be depended upon. There's particularly a memo describing a meeting between you and Ben-Gurion which was in May of '63, in which he constantly reiterates his fear of the threat of extinction, that is if Israel could literally be wiped off the map. And when you then raised the fact that the United States had made a pledge, that Kennedy had pledged, he said – this is Ben-Gurion – “I understand that,” he said, “but such aid might not come in time,” that the time is used in the Middle East. “In thirty minutes,” he said, “we could be destroyed.” And he then said, quote, “We must depend upon ourselves,” unquote. And I couldn't help wondering if that wasn't a sort of a veiled threat on the Israelis' part to produce nuclear weapons, or how did you assess that?

BARBOUR: No, I don't think that I interpreted it at that time anyway, and I certainly still don't now interpret it as any indication about nuclear weapons. This as we now know in retrospect with BG's stepping down shortly after ...

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: ... was part, the letter was part of.... Apparently, nobody knew it at the time, he was preparing himself historically for his departure.

STERN: That's interesting.

BARBOUR: I'm trying to get on the record his summation of what had been done to form the State of Israel, and his part in it, and what were his continuing major concerns, in fact indicating that the major concern was so fundamental as to suggest grave apprehension on his part, anyway, and also for some

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other Israeli, well, to continue the existence of Israel after his departure.

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: In fact, I now know that the original draft he wrote in Hebrew, that'll be translated into English ...

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: ... and the original draft of that letter had a horrible statement in it, historically, to the effect that he didn't expect Israel to survive after his departure, that nobody else could run the country, only him ...

STERN: Oh, my goodness.

BARBOUR: ... and that Israel would, then the Jews would suffer another dispersion of another two thousand years and all sorts of stuff. Anyway, it was handed to a friend of mine who translates, and it got translated into English. It got twisted, changed around a little bit. First time, BG wouldn't buy it because it was just taken out. So they had to make another effort to go back and try to phrase it better which he finally did buy because he said that said the same thing [laughter], which it didn't, but still.... And that we now know was because he was thinking of giving up.

STERN: Did.... I meant, as a matter of fact on that very point, to ask you what impact his resignation had on U.S.-Israeli relations and....

BARBOUR: Well, not a great deal because Eshkol was a very major member of his cabinet before. In fact, Eshkol constructed the cabinet after the last previous election. BG had retired, ____ won't have anything to do with negotiations to form a cabinet.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: Wanted Eshkol to form it. Then call him up, says, "Come on. Be prime minister. Here's your cabinet." And Eshkol was the Minister of Finance, and he was a man of very great standing, and very much respected throughout all of Israel, all walks of life and all. The, for what impact, as far as the United States was concerned, was not much.

STERN: Mm-hmm. When Kennedy's letter arrived in the first week

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of October, which essentially turned down Ben-Gurion's request for a bilateral treaty, then a memo that you delivered the letter personally to Eshkol and that his reaction was that he was not happy with Kennedy's response ...

BARBOUR: Well, I have to say that.

STERN: ... and he said, quote, "We would have to concentrate on obtaining the practical elements of deterrence" unquote, which again suggested to me a nuclear threat. But you apparently don't feel that he was making that kind of threat. I wonder what he meant by....

BARBOUR: Sorry, the poor guy is dead so we can't ask him. But....

STERN: I wondered what he meant by that. It seemed to me that he was saying, "If you don't give us what we want, then we'll have to look elsewhere" and he might be talking about....

BARBOUR: They have to rely on their own resources. Well, the deterrent effect would be a lot. The airplane, for one thing, would be a course, practically started concentrating on getting airplanes from us almost his first time in office.

STERN: Do you feel that by saying that he didn't think too much of Kennedy's response that that was essentially a strategic thing that he had to say or....

BARBOUR: Yeah. I think BG knew when he wrote the letter, I think Eshkol knew when he got it back. But we were not going to waltz through the hullabaloo with the chance of failing, of signing any formal peace treaty, or a peace treaty but a security guarantee treaty ...

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: ... with Israel which would detail all sorts of darn things. Couldn't have been done by the executive agreement because Mr. Dulles had criticized Truman

[Harry S. Truman] and the predecessors and so forth. So much for Lincoln [Abraham Lincoln]. Executive agreements that had the force of treaties, that any future administration was put off of the idea of any executive agreements and would have to be a formal treaty. Chances of getting it through without causing any unnecessary hullabaloo were very slim. And we won't do it no

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matter what was, except for the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] Alliance which, of course, is security guarantee. This was just not part of the ball game at that time.

STERN: Excuse me.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

BARBOUR: Is this on now? Well, he was really criticizing us for, well, taking too long to react.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: It was a great example of this later in the law of attrition, as I recall, this was 1970, '71, '70. The Israelis produced photographs which was good as aerial reconnaissance photograph ever, as I can never make anything out of the darn things anyhow, but showing where the Egyptians had moved up their missiles ...

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: ... during the period before the cease-fire. We wouldn't accept that and wouldn't react until we sent our own fellows to take the same damn pictures. This was the most ridiculous caper. Just because it came from somebody else. And, sure, when our pictures eventually showed the same thing, then we gave Nasser hell. But I'm not sure where the ____ then, but it was a.... Sure we.... We're not all a bunch of geniuses in Washington. Why they thought our pictures were gonna be any better and....

STERN: That's an interesting example. Right after the failure, well, I won't say the failure, but the refusal of President Kennedy to grant this bilateral treaty or consider it, came the beginning of these joint military talks in Washington between the United States and Israel. Ambassador Gazit feels that those were very, very important in the way, as he explained this to me, he feels that it was really those represent more than anything else a turning point in U.S.-Israeli relations. And it was interesting to me to look at the origins of those talks, and the material at the Library and it seemed, in terms of the State Department position on Israel, that the State Department was giving as little as it could and perceived in those talks initially with very limited goals in mind. For example, in

late September, which it was, although Kennedy's letter had not yet been sent to Eshkol, it had already been drafted, so of course the State Department knew what was in it,

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the State department said that these joint military talks would be useful from an Israeli point of view, would make them feel a little better, having just been turned down on the bilateral treaty. But the State Department material on this, particularly a memo from Rusk himself, in which he said that the scope of these talks would be extremely limited and "we would not regard them as a prelude to joint military consultations," that they would be kept secret and that they would be limited only to the United States listening to what Israel had to say about what Egypt was doing. And that's it. And not to request for armaments or anything like that. And this was reiterated, over and over again. There was a Rusk cable, October 16, 1963, in which Rusk said that "we must resist all efforts by the government of Israel to broaden the scope of these talks. We will not discuss joint military planning, we will not discuss regular military consultations, and we will not discuss additional weapons from the United States." It will only be a matter of listening to what Israel perceives to be the nature of the Egyptian build-up. Yet, Ambassador Gazit feels that, despite these limitations, once the talks actually happened, they did become more important and were a turning point.

BARBOUR: Well, I think Gazit's right. That has all the earmarks of State Department traditional caution and leaning over backwards to tie down the scope of various things. Of course, this also reflects several things. One of the major things that it reflects is that the State Department is dubious about how much control it has over our own military, about the Pentagon, and which it knows damn well it hasn't got any control over the Pentagon, or didn't have, and that unless a negative blue print was given at the beginning, god knows where they'd go. Similarly, it was also great opposition to these talks in Israel by no less than Dayan himself.

STERN: Now that's interesting. Why was that?

BARBOUR: Because he felt that Israel was going to be called upon to reveal a whole lot of stuff which has always been regarded by Israelis as secret. I remember Ezer Weizman telling me when he came back or when he set off to, because he lived the first ones; he was still chief of the air force. He said he'd strip himself naked than talk to the Pentagon. And they did become important. And the Pentagon didn't make any commitments at that time to make airplanes available. That came later ...

STERN: Mm-hmm.

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BARBOUR: ... with Harriman, and they, with Eshkol in Israel, and didn't make any other specific commitments, but they got a basis of mutual understanding among

the militaries which was very useful in the changing atmosphere. And I think Gazit's right.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: Not so much what was said. I suppose our intelligence people, one way or another, because I, though perhaps not. I knew most of what Israel had, a little was amazing, was revealing. I don't really know. The Israelis were damn good at keeping military secrets and what they get together they expand, and well, it became pretty much joint operational talks....

STERN: Yes, they did despite the initial caution.

BARBOUR: Well, Gazit's right. It was the personalities, get 'em together and let 'em hash it out. Sure, the Americans' move was Dean Rusk whenever ____ was around, but they didn't do anything that was specifically opposed to what our guys did for them. They did lay a ground work.

STERN: That's very interesting. I wonder, do you basically feel that Gazit's fundamental thesis is right? I mean he feels essentially that, if you look at the Hawks and the verbal security guarantee and then the joint military talks, that the Kennedy Administration really is the turning point in U.S. relations with Israel, given particularly the ...

BARBOUR: Oh sure.

STERN: ... the passivity of the Eisenhower Administration.

BARBOUR: It wasn't passivity, it was antagonism.

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: It was worse than passivity. I personally feel that our whole posture in the Suez adventure by the British, French and Israelis was pretty ignominious although the adventure was a pretty damn foolhardy one to begin with. But we should have known, it seems to me, though I'm ____ not a military man, but it seems to me that any military man that had anything to do with that planning would know that you cannot take a fellow's canal away from him and leave him sitting up in Cairo immune from attack or any kind of harassment or anything else.

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This isn't gonna work. Sure they, now why they didn't know is beyond me, so, I think....

STERN: I've just got a few more questions. One, on the whole question of aid to

Israel, again in economic aid. I found the State Department material suggesting that tremendous amount of caution, if that's the right word, maybe it's even more than that, about economic aid....

BARBOUR: I don't think there was any opposition. There was.... Well they knew....

STERN: For example, let me give you an example. They've develop now loan money which was cut back in '63 and then cut back even further under Johnson. I know the Israelis wanted to get more but instead they got less.

BARBOUR: Yeah, on this aid business, you have to realize that the Israelis are damn good bargainers, and they asked for the whole shooting works to begin with. How far we were off what they secretly estimated they might get, given the circumstances, is not very clear. They didn't protest that a whale of a lot. I mean, they protested for the lack in ____ the talks and so forth ...

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: ... and talking to me officially they would protest, but it wasn't any soul-searching, heart-rending, tearing of garments over there, the fact they didn't get it. The Jewish community were, after all, providing about 70 or 80 million dollars a year, aside from bonds, gifts ...

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: ... which is American aid in a different guise if you wish.

STERN: Mm-hmm. I wonder, perhaps, if you could speak briefly at least, about how you ran the US embassy in Israel, how big it was, what kind of a staff you had and...

BARBOUR: Oh, I don't remember the figures. It was good size. I think we had, well, you could look those up easily enough, but I think there's 50 or 60 American officers, State Department, military attaches; we didn't have any military mission, which is another thing that Dayan didn't want. He thought these talks might lead to a military mission and ____

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and they didn't want that then floating around. And several hundred Israelis.

STERN: Several hundred?

BARBOUR: Well, you had to have them. We had a very big consular section.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: Visas, passports and quite a lot of veterans' affairs...

STERN: Mm-hmm.

BARBOUR: ... payments ____ Americans who'd fought in the American army and retired over there.

STERN: Oh, that's interesting.

BARBOUR: And I could tell from, no, that's not it. The telephone directory of 1963 is quite a sizeable ____

STERN: My goodness. That's just what I was wondering about. It is certainly a very large volume.

BARBOUR: ____ just how many.

STERN: Did you feel you had a good staff, people that you really worked with very well?

BARBOUR: Excellent. Excellent, really. They sent very good people out there. Yeah, we had a good embassy. In fact, it was a good time. I enjoyed it.

STERN: Well, let me ask you one last question which is about the impact of Kennedy's death in Israel, and how it affected the transition, or what was the nature of the transition to Johnson's Administration in terms of American-Israeli relations?

BARBOUR: Well....

STERN: Did the Israelis see Kennedy's death as a great blow to their interests?

BARBOUR: Yeah. They were very seriously, well, not to their interests, but they were seriously distressed, and

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there was a great outpouring of grief, genuine grief. I was out. I got the word at the Italian ambassador's house. Came on the radio that he'd been shot. As you remember he didn't die right, I think he probably had died, but they didn't announce it for a few

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: ... hours more. And the President, Shazar [Schneor Zalman Shazar], tracked me down out there to condole on the phone, even before I had had time to get a coat on and go back to the embassy, when he heard the news. And then I had a terrible time finding a book of condolences to have people come and write their name because it happened to be a Friday night and we'd almost closed up. But I finally, somebody scouted around and got a stationary store to open the back door despite the fact that it was beginning to be Saturday, and get a couple of books. The full cabinet came down, Eshkol and everybody else, and signed the book and there was real sorrow, whatever. I didn't detect too much apprehension.

STERN: That's what I'm wondering. Did they feel that Johnson was ____ the quantity or....

BARBOUR: No, I don't think so. Well, I think that they felt he was not on quantity because he hadn't played any great part up to that.

STERN: Right.

BARBOUR: But Eshkol had very little difficulty in establishing relations, extremely close relations with Johnson. I don't know why it was, whether they just got on the right wavelength or something, but, because they both been fundamentally farmers or what. But I remember later, after Johnson had been in a while, Eshkol wanted to come over and President Johnson wanted to see him. And the State Department said for some reason, well, I guess he'd been there on an official visit too recently, and advised Johnson against it. Now I happened to be there. ____ Johnson said, "I guess we're on vacation." He said, "The State Department says I can't do this. But," he says, "to hell with them. 'Cause he's a friend of mine and I'm gonna have him come over here. And if he can't come to Washington, well, I'll go down to ____," which they did. And finally Johnson asserted himself, and he was known to use colorful language, 'cause they became very close friends and did a lot of things for the good of Israel and the United States.

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STERN: Do you have any points that you might like to add about your general reaction to that.

BARBOUR: No. No, I don't think so. No, I.... For the record I suppose this emphasizes it's obvious that very interesting and rewarding twelve years, almost, and three months. And I think my relations with a lot of the Israelis are things that I, remembrances and friendships that I cherish greatly.

STERN: Well.

BARBOUR: All right.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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