

**Parker T. Hart Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 05/27/1969**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Parker T. Hart  
**Interviewer:** Dennis J. O'Brien  
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**Biographical Note**

Hart was a member of the U.S. Foreign Service, 1938–1949; the U.S. Consul General in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, 1949–1951; Director of the Office of Near East Affairs, 1952–1955; Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Egypt, 1955–1958; the U.S. Consul General in Damascus, Syria, 1958; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, 1958–1960; the U.S. Ambassador to North Yemen (1961–1962), Kuwait (1962–1963), Saudi Arabia (1961–1965), and Turkey (1965–1968); and the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, 1968–1969. In this interview Hart discusses dealing with Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser including shifts in U.S. aid in Egypt; how Nasser would play the United States and the Soviet Union against each other for Egypt's benefit; Nasser's ambitions for the neighboring countries and the Saudi reaction to Egypt's actions in the Arabian Peninsula; the increased strain between Egypt and the United States; divisions in Washington over the U.S. policy towards Nasser; Nasser's position on Israel; Saudi Arabia's position on Israel and the Palestinian refugees in Saudi Arabia; the modernization process in Saudi Arabia; and changes in foreign policy over Hart's tenure as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, among other issues.

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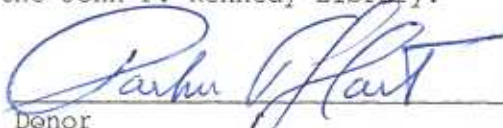
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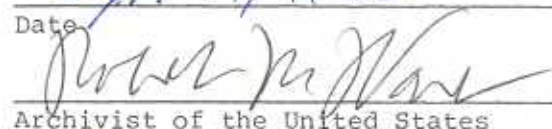
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Parker T. Hart – JFK #2  
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Second Oral History Interview

With

PARKER T. HART

May 27, 1969  
Arlington, Virginia

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HART: Well, in the late fifties, during the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration and in the aftermath of the Suez crisis of '56-'57 there was a willingness in the State Department, at highest levels of our government, to accept Nasser's [Gamal Abdel Nasser] stated desire to turn over a new page in Egyptian-American relations, but they were skeptical about whether he really meant it and whether he would do anything—or could do anything, perhaps—that would make relations more meaningful. They were skeptical and watchful, but willing to meet any genuine steps to remove the road blocks to better relations.

Now, in concrete terms, what Nasser really wanted was aid restored. All aid had been interrupted by the crisis of '56. Our aid mission had been evacuated along with American official dependents and with many, many private Americans from the country. Nasser needed economic aid; he needed wheat. But his general behavior was not very reassuring. The additional factor in the situation, I always felt, was that the United States had had to take a position very drastically against the position of the British and the French governments and wanted to restore relations with those two governments even more badly than it wanted to restore relations with Nasser—that is to say, good relations (we had relations; relations were never interrupted). It was a somewhat inhibiting thing to suddenly jump to give a lot of aid to Nasser, restore aid to Nasser, in the face of a very divided British feeling over the whole event.

Of more immediate urgency was to get the Canal [Suez Canal] reopened, and on this our government pushed very strongly to do this through the mechanism of the United Nations. But Nasser did want to restore bilateral relations to a better status. I think he wanted this because otherwise he would be too much in the hands of the Soviets. Nasser has always followed the policy of maintaining a kind of equilibrium between the Soviet bloc on the one side and the Western bloc on the other and, in specific terms, between Moscow and Washington. That's the core of the equilibrium. At a moment when he was just getting something good out of the United States, he would immediately make a gesture toward the Soviet Union, a strong gesture. And he preferred to be able to do the same with respect to his ties with the United States when he'd received something very special from the Soviet Union because he wanted both sides to be worried about the extent of his involvement with the other. This lies at the root of Nasser's policy, in my opinion, even today, and it is not working now because he doesn't have relations with us.

But at that time, it was a very obvious pattern, and it annoyed Washington, and on the very aftermath, we'll say, of stating his desire to restore good relations with the United States or at least turn over a new page, as I think he used the expression, he started in Cairo, gave encouragement to the formation of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference, which had a very pronounced left wing anti-Western, anti-U.S. flavor, really was almost Communist dominated from the beginning. This puzzled Washington. And he did things of this kind.

He also showed a considerable ambition to master the affairs of the countries nearby. In Libya where we had an important base, he continued to intrigue there, and also to intrigue in Lebanon. He was unfriendly in his basic posture toward King Saud [Saud, King of Arabia], although they were theoretically colleagues. It was not a warm relationship. All these things disturbed Washington, and they were therefore very cautious.

And then came the Lebanese crisis of '58. This was the hand of Nasser working through Syria to stir up this tremendous confrontation within the country, which was not cleanly along Christian and Muslim lines, but had overtones of anti-Westernism and neutralism when Lebanon was really disposed to be very pro-Western and not neutral at all under Chamoun [Camille Chamoun]. And this civil war which occurred was an expensive thing for Lebanon. It was expensive also for Syria, which was made to pay the bill and paid an enormous bill to try to overthrow the Chamoun government, and didn't do so with any referendum from the Syrian people, I might say. It was strictly a dictatorial action. And this, of course, set our relations with Egypt still further back in '58.

Then in the course of the Lebanese insurrection and troubles, the great revolution occurred in Iraq and Qasim [Abd al-Karim Qasim] came in, not a creature of Nasser at all, unwilling to accept overtures of friendship from Nasser, distrustful of Nasser, went direct to Moscow for his military aid and strengthened his ties with Moscow directly and in such a drastic fashion that it worried Nasser. It worried Nasser on two counts: one was that it showed Iraq was unwilling to join the new formed union with Syria and be subordinate to Cairo and, secondly, because it looked as though there might really be a Communist takeover

in Iraq which would mean that the forces of Arab nationalism allied with Nasser would be defeated. And when Qasim formed his popular militia and put apparent Communists in positions of great authority, it was very disturbing to Nasser, who then came to us, in effect saying, "Look what these Communists are doing. This man is a dangerous man." And he began to speak out very openly against Moscow's interference in internal Arab affairs in a manner which he had never used before and hasn't really used since.

This improved somewhat the climate of relations between us, but nothing of great consequence took place that I can recall in that period. There continued to be a distrust in Washington during the last days of the Eisenhower regime but a willingness to see what sort of cards he was going to play and to meet him partway; that is, if he was going to be genuine about it and really make concrete attempts to take a position which was really neutral and not pro-Soviet neutral, they were willing to come in his direction. So that was the way it ran through the end of the Eisenhower Administration without too much happening, but attempts were made to show good will. At the end of the Eisenhower Administration, we sent a first class man as Ambassador there, Fred Reinhardt [G. Frederick Reinhardt], which was a signal of the importance we attached to our relations with Egypt, but I can't really say that I can remember that anything very much was accomplished by it.

And then the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] Administration came in. There was an obvious effort to start afresh all around, to take a brand new look at all these relationships. I think that the Kennedy Administration is marked very clearly by a desire to find those areas of agreement with Nasser that could be identified and then work within those areas of mutual interest where there was no real conflict and see how much they could be developed. And those areas where we couldn't agree and obviously couldn't agree, we just put those to one side, so to speak, to try to avoid things which would exacerbate them—encouraging them, of course, to do the same. This was a fairly frank policy.

And in the framework of this, the State Department, for the very first time that I know of, managed to get through a three-year agricultural surplus aid program and put it into effect with respect to Egypt, which

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would have the intent, obviously, of removing Egypt's dependence on the Soviet Union for that kind of basic import, settle her food problems, in effect, for several years, give her a chance to get on her feet economically, enlarge her trade opportunities—cotton and other things that she could export to the West to get hard currency and not have to use it all to pay back the Soviet Union. There was no expectation that the Egyptians would really diminish their dependency for armament on the Soviet Union, but it was hoped that their pronouncements in the world scene would be more neutral and less pro-Sovietal.

This didn't work, this latter part. They never got any real pro-Western pronouncements out of Nasser that I can remember. He continued to pay the price for his dependence on Soviet equipment in the coin of a pro-Soviet stance on East-West issues. He eventually recognized North Vietnam in the middle of all this, which didn't help much, and North Korea I believe, if I'm not mistaken, was also recognized.

And then he apparently took this large aid in agricultural products and this big gesture of good will by the Kennedy Administration as something of a hunting license to go after the

countries he really wanted to control and, specifically, Saudi Arabia, where I was posted from '61 to '65. Things looked very different down there than they did in Cairo because we were on the receiving end of his actions. There was not much to discourage the Egyptians from making a college try. King Saud was incompetent, sick, surrounded by sycophants and by spendthrift sons who were living riotous lives. He himself was wasting millions of dollars; there's no question about it.

Now Saudi Arabia, being a rather static society, for a long time could tolerate this waste. They had never had very much money in the past. A lot of splurging and spending filtered its way down into the economy and stimulated business, but things had gotten to the point where it was a scandal and Saud's reputation had dropped within his own country just as it had dropped almost to zero within the neighboring Arab countries. His image in the world was very poor. So Nasser took advantage of this to declare cold war on Saud while I was there and on the entire Saud dynasty.

Now Faisal [Faisal, King of Saudi Arabia] had always considered himself a friend, a personal friend, but he was lumped in, so to speak, in the collectivity of condemning the whole Saud clan. He didn't like it. This disturbed him deeply. There's no substitute for the Saud clan as the kind of nerve system of the Saudi Arabian body politic; it's the thing that keeps it going at this stage of its history. There's no one else to do it. It's such a completely unique society that you have to understand it firsthand. I don't think Nasser ever did, because he seemed to think that it was going to be just toppled like some of the more fragile monarchies that he'd seen toppled in other parts of the Arab world. Well, it didn't topple, but he certainly made his college try.

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And then when the Yemen revolution occurred, which he certainly encouraged—had advance notice that it was going to occur and had his men ready to be embarked and sail for the Yemen—it showed an obvious preparation to expand his control over the Arabian peninsula for the first time since the days of Ibrahim Pasha in the mid-nineteenth century when they made an invasion of what was then just a tribal land without any unity and were finally forced to retire.

The Saudis have a feeling about the whole peninsula since they occupy most of it, in their premises anyway, and they have a feeling of the rest of it much like we do about the Monroe [James Monroe] Doctrine: These foreigners coming in and trying to establish colonial empires and bases is objectionable. They didn't—they couldn't agree that the British had a right in Aden, but much less did they want to see Nasser come in. He was a dynamic force that was going to probably work against them, against every other influence in the community that would oppose him.

All of this caused a great deal of strain between the Egyptians and ourselves because of our close relations, which have been traditional with Saudi Arabia since the day when Harry Truman [Harry S. Truman] gave a pledge, in effect, to the old King, Abdul Aziz [Ibn Saud, King of Saudi Arabia], that we would be very concerned over any threat to the political independence, territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia. This was reaffirmed by President Kennedy to Faisal when he was still Crown Prince but had become, in effect, the chief executive of the country in the fall of '62 when he visited Washington. And to give it some



concrete terms, we stepped up our destroyer visits to Jidda, which had probably taken place about once a year at the most, to once a month. And then we put in some training teams. We even had the Green Berets in there for a little while, for a few days: training exercises with Saudi forces, parachute jumps with them—they love to jump. And then as the crisis deepened in the Yemen and the Egyptians did what they swore, what Nasser swore, they never would do to any Arab—which is physically attack another Arab country with weapons—they did attack Saudi Arabia and bombarded the south and overflowed the country and tried to intimidate it, we went a step farther. We kept putting in more training teams; we issued warnings to Nasser. It didn't have any effect.

One of the highlights of this episode was the dropping of 108 bundles of ammunition and weaponry on the Saudi coast in February of '63 in the expectation on Cairo's side that the Bedouins and others would pick these weapons up and go after the government. They misestimated the whole situation—the Bedouins turned the weapons in to the police. And there was no party of revolutionaries to pick up this enormous quantity of weaponry, ready-to-go weapons, put the clips right in and start firing. I saw them, inspected them myself. They were discovered on a training

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flight in which we had participation of some of our military. This weapons drop, well, this deepened, of course, the feeling of distrust in Washington of Nasser's intentions. He was saying one thing and doing another all the time with respect to Saudi Arabia.

The Bunker [Ellsworth Bunker] mission came out and finally, as you know, resolved the height of the crisis by a formula which provided for a United Nations inspection mission to the Yemen to watch two things: one was the stoppage of aid to the Royalists by the Saudis, and the other thing was the exodus of the Egyptian troops from the Yemen. That was the deal. In return for stopping aid, they were to get their troops out.

O'BRIEN: Right.

HART: Faisal never liked this arrangement, because he said, "Nasser will never live up to it," you know. "I will stop aid to the Royalists, but you watch what he does. He won't withdraw his men; he'll just go through the motions." And sure enough, that was exactly what happened. He didn't withdraw his men. He'd withdraw some contingents, and they'd be counted out, and then he wouldn't draw any or he'd slow it up.

And the end of the year was reached, and the mission was finally withdrawn—well, I'm sorry. Backing up a little bit, we also put in an air unit into the Yemen as a training mission, but it was a good signal of our interest. They were F-100 aircraft and loaded and American pilots, and they overflowed the areas that could have been threatened. There was no Egyptian over-flight during the period that our air unit was in there.

O'BRIEN: Now were these stationed at Dhahran?

HART: These were stationed out of Dhahran and out of Jidda, the forward

position was Jidda and the base was Dhahran. They were there—the stated purpose to train Saudi pilots. They trained and trained and trained but they did a lot of flying around. The meaning of this, of course, was completely understood by the Egyptians because they didn't attempt any intrusions during that period.

The combination of these factors did put pressure on Nasser and eventually he realized that this was not a winning streak anymore, that he was not getting anywhere, either in the Yemen or in Saudi Arabia. Faisal had showed a great will to resist Nasser's plans; the United States was getting more and more upset with him. He (Nasser) finally lit upon a brilliant idea in January of '64, after Kennedy's death, which was, "Let's summon all the Arab chiefs of state to Cairo to discuss the Israeli plans to divert Jordan waters. And at that high level of mutual agreement on a completely negative theme, we'll get consensus and we'll be able to iron out some of our other problems." This was understood by all the

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Arabs, too; they knew exactly what this signal meant.

But they went to their meetings in Cairo, and Faisal went, eventually. He and Nasser had talks, restored some of the personal cordiality but not a great deal of mutual trust. But at least the matter then was between them direct, and we were no longer mediators. And as you know, the Yemen thing is finally sort of settled back into the mold that it's now between Yemenis; Nasser's troops have long since gone.

But what I'm trying to say is that in this period the original American all-out bid to try to make an understanding with Nasser on the areas with which we could hope to have some understanding and diminish the areas of disagreement did not succeed. But I think it was useful for us to make the try because it did show good will on our side, and it was he who upset it by his adventures in the Arabian Peninsula and his continued pressure on other countries with whom he disagreed.

We tried again in another way, that when the union with Syria was overthrown by the Syrians we didn't hurry to recognize this new Syrian government. We waited, consulted with Nasser, and for quite a time before we extended recognition and then even more before we extended some aid to this government, which had expected that we would come at once to it because, actually, it was made up of the kind of people who thought they had everything in common with us. They were business people; they were industrialists; they were conservative people. But they in their turn themselves were overthrown later in '63. Go ahead.

O'BRIEN: Oh, I was going to say, in official Washington, in policy-making circles; did you detect any splits in attitude towards policy, any con....

HART: Toward Nasser?

O'BRIEN: Towards Nasser.

HART: Oh, yes, there were, because.... Well, I myself felt—and expressed it many times—that we were, by going so far toward Nasser, giving him a hunting

license to hit some of our better friends in the area, smaller societies which had a hope of development along their own lines. Nasser's experiments with Arab socialism were not something that these countries should emulate. There's no reason to hand over control of these countries to Nasser. You'd just get a form of dictatorial socialism, which was not working economically very well in Egypt and which was certainly against our beliefs in the form of government which should emerge, government by consent according to the community's desires, not government imposed by some military dictator with a strong tie with the Soviet Union with risks of side effects that you

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couldn't foresee. There was no reason to hand it over to Nasser, and I felt very strongly that we were giving him a hunting license to do just this. And I frequently stated that I felt that it was not in our interest to allow this to happen.

Well, they did come back and help Saudi Arabia in the manner I described. They bolstered them. But they didn't want to cut their ties with Nasser. They still wanted to keep as warm and as strong a tie in the hope that eventually he'd see the light. This kind of disagreement I'm sure was probably reflected in discussions here, but I was not here. I was in the field. That would work itself out through a set of facts.

It proved itself, in a way, because subsequently, as you know, when Luke Battle [Lucius D. Battle] went to Egypt, he hadn't much more than gotten there before they burned the library and did all sort of outrageous things against us, at least with Nasser's tolerance of the situation and in some cases he spoke words against us which were pretty strong. It made the relations very poor.

One of the problems we've always had with Nasser has been that Nasser would never really accept and put into effect economic advice from sound quarters like the World Bank [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development]. We were always trying to support the World Bank as a main instrument of aid. We didn't want to have his dependence completely upon us. He never liked that. He wanted to have the thing on a political basis, that in return for... Well, I don't know in return for very much, but we would give him economic aid based on a desire to be friends with him and he could spend it as he wished, or use the substitute proceeds, if you will, to spend as he wished. This was not solving his foreign exchange problem because he wasn't spending wisely. We felt that he was overspending on the military side and using these weapons in the Yemen and other places where he had no business using them. Attempts to try to argue with him were counterproductive. He got angry, as he does, and gave us the verbal back of the hand more than once, which deteriorated relations and showed that the policy really wasn't working.

I think it was a good try on our side, and should remain as a testimony to our attempts to get along with a man who, beyond any question, has the biggest image in the area, did have, still has today, but unfortunately has so much ambition to control and harness his Arab neighbors in such an unscrupulous way that he was doing more damage than anything else in the area. In fact, as I look back on it, I'm unable to identify a single constructive thing that Nasser did outside of his own country in the neighboring Arab states. All the things that he did were largely negative. I can't identify a constructive influence by Nasser among his Arab neighbors.

O'BRIEN: Were your colleagues, some of the people like yourself, for example, in Near East, who had been there and had been involved in Near East affairs—I'm thinking of people like Phillips Talbot, for example....

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HART: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Were you people all pretty much in agreement on Nasser?

HART: No. I wouldn't say so. We agreed on certain basic things. I never found basic fault with the attempt to try to meet Nasser in the areas where we felt we might find an area of agreement. I simply objected to going as far as we did and as fast as we did. I felt that he was taking it the wrong way and that he was really just making a farce out of it. The policy direction at the White House and the State Department was to keep trying and argue, and keep trying and persuade. I felt that the time had arrived in which, by the time of the Yemen crisis, at least, that only facts could persuade him. I think they agreed with me in part because they did put the air unit in there and they did strengthen our presence. And they did a lot to preserve the self confidence of Faisal's government. See, he really came into power effectively in '62, although he didn't become King until the fall of '64, two years later. But it was really his government from the fall of '62 on. And they did, the Kennedy Administration, give great support to Faisal. I think to Nasser it was rather confusing because I don't think he understood our giving support to him and to the other fellow at the same time, and for a long time believed that he could overthrow that regime. He certainly tried.

O'BRIEN: It's in the White House that you find support for a very conciliatory policy towards Nasser and also a rather large degree of support for a, oh, very friendly and amenable policy towards Israel?

HART: Well, I think the White House felt that if they could reduce the areas of disagreement with Nasser and expand the areas of agreement up to a point, that Nasser was the one man who could make peace with Israel and that this would give an opportunity for that to happen. Certainly, Egypt is the key—or a major key, if not the major key—to any solution of the Arab-Israel problem. There's no question about that. But I expressed concern that Nasser ever had the slightest intention of making a deal with Israel, that the Arab-Israel quarrel was far too important to him at that juncture. This is before '67 I'm talking about. It was far too important to him. If he lost that thing, what would he have to harness his Arab states with to his chariot? It's hard to see what it would be.

I feel now the ground rules are somewhat different because he's got his own territory occupied by the Israelis, but in those days he had no particular reason to go ahead and make a deal with the Israelis. He had everything he wanted. He could exclude their ships from the Suez Canal. He was not suffering any harm from them in any way. And to have buried the

hatchet with Israel would have been to probably have buried his leadership position with the Arabs of the East, not the Arabs of the

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Maghreb so much but the Arabs of the East. And he didn't want to do that. He wanted to keep his image high and his capabilities high, I think not because of an underlying desire to destroy Israel, anywhere near as much as a desire to harness the Arab world to his chariot. He's basically oriented in the direction of hegemony over the neighboring Arab states, in fact, as much as of the Arab world as he can get under his hegemony.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever have any contacts or conversations with either Robert Komer [Robert W. Komer], who was, of course, involved in Middle East affairs in the White House, or Myer Feldman?

HART: Never talked to Myer Feldman at all. Komer and I talked many times.

O'BRIEN: How did Komer line up in regard to attitudes and policies towards Nasser?

HART: Well, we would agree on many things, but he was.... Well, I'm sure I can remember at least one case in which we just disagreed was in the extent of faith put into the possibility of doing business with Nasser. I basically felt that you could never really do much business with him because it didn't add up. It didn't add up in my own experience with the man; it didn't add up to my analysis of his motivations and his ambitions. And yet, as I say, I'm rather glad for the record that we made an attempt at least to help Egypt and didn't just ignore it, and for this reason, that we can now cite that record beyond dispute, that on two historic occasions we've gone very far in helping Nasser: one was in the period 1953 to '56, three years of intense effort with lots of aid and offers of military aid included with offers of economic aid (and considerable economic aid given, over a hundred million, a hundred and fifty million in one year, I think); and then again, in the early sixties. So there's no validity, I think, in the minds of most Arabs who are not totally ignorant, to the argument that we have tried to eliminate this symbol of Arab nationalism and have failed to give him the help that he should have had. He has cut the ties, not we. And he's done it more than once.

O'BRIEN: In your relations with the Saudi government, how did you handle the problem of Israel and, I suspect, the suspicion of the Saudis that we had a very conciliatory and favorable policy towards Israel?

HART: Well, in the first place, the Saudis are different from the Egyptians and the Syrians and the others. They don't bring up the subject of Israel with you if they can help it. They feel just as deeply about Palestine as any other Arab, but sheer courtesy toward a guest, even when he's an ambassador, prevents their raising the subject which they felt there's no solution for and about which we can probably do nothing, unless there's some compelling situation in which they

have to raise it in business. This has been the pattern of Saudi performance from the beginning. Now there was a period in which they raised it constantly, and that was back in the days when Israel was being born in the United Nations. Then they were fighting all the time. But since the thing was changed by the '48-'49 war, my experience with the Saudis has been they don't raise it if they can avoid raising it.

The Saudis share the general Arab feeling of outrage over the refugees from Palestine. Many of those refugees came to Saudi Arabia. Some of them were nice people, but as a group they're not trusted by the Saudis. They are regarded as a little too sharp, a little too supercilious. Saudis know when a neighboring Arab is looking down his nose. The country is raw, primitive, struggling to modernize in its peculiar Wahhabi way. These people from neighboring countries didn't understand the situation and didn't want to understand it, just liked to criticize and make fun of it, scorn it, if you will. It's been an attitude Palestinians have shown on occasion. So they weren't liked very much as a group; individuals, yes, they were welcomed as refugees. They were never given permanent citizenship, except in very few cases. They were accepted as refugees who would someday return to their own homeland, and they were given more or less numerical quotas. Always, I believe, they never had very large presence in Saudi Arabia, but for specific skills and purposes they came down to work. They were treated all right on the whole, except when they insulted a Saudi or insulted the special religious and social principles that the Saudis live by, and then they'd be pretty rough on them.

As far as America is concerned, the Saudis behaved toward us about the way we tried to behave toward Nasser; that is to say, find areas of agreement and let's not talk about the rest. Their relationship with the United States is a fundamental thing with them. That relationship started at a time when the Saudis had no friends anywhere in the world, including their neighbors, some of which were under foreign tutelage anyway. They've never felt a very close bond of personal friendship with their neighbors, except where you have tribal relationships. They've always felt themselves those are rather localized relationships. They've always felt themselves something apart, different from Syrians, from Egyptians (as indeed they are), or even Iraqis. It's this feeling of being somewhat alone in the world and having suddenly discovered an extremely rich resource that made them instinctively go toward a party they felt they could trust, who would have no interest in exploiting them, which is the United States, that there'd be a business relationship not a political exploitation. And in fact, we've tried to keep it that way ourselves over the years, and they've responded very well.

I think there's an underlying, deep feeling of fraternal trust toward the United States shared by more Saudis than we're aware of.

They come to the United States, you know, as youngsters going to school, and they sort of feel that every American should know that there's a special relationship. Well, most Americans don't know it. Those who have lived there do. The Saudis kind of look toward

us—and have traditionally for now thirty years—not as blood cousins, but as very special friends to whom they can look for help and get it without any special afterthoughts of underlying motives. So there's a warmth there underneath that's greater than most Americans know. I found it even in the villages and the desert areas in Saudi Arabia. Some of these fellows, some of these sheikhs or little emirs of small communities have their sons at school in the United States (and now the daughters are starting in this direction) and they speak with great pride, they themselves being unable to say or to speak anything but Arabic and having never been out of the country. So Saudis look upon Israel as a very unfortunate area of misunderstanding with the United States, which, God willing, may someday be removed. But the basic relationship is bilateral.

O'BRIEN: Well, as the Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and being there through years in which, of course, there were changes on the American side.... well, of course, you took over and became Ambassador under the Kennedy Administration and then, of course, transcended through to the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] Administration, and also, you were there, too, during a time of rather rapid modernization in Saudi society and culture. Well, first of all, let's take the transition period in American policy. Did you see any significant transition taking place, well, from the Kennedy Administration to the Johnson Administration in regard to Saudi Arabian or Middle East affairs?

HART: Any change in modernization, did you say?

O'BRIEN: Any changes, yes.

HART: Yes, I did. Just give me a moment, and I'll resume. [Interruption]  
First of all, with respect to modernization in Saudi Arabia, the assumption of executive authority by delegation from King Saud by Crown Prince Faisal in the fall of '62 marked a turning point in modernization in Saudi Arabia, or rather, it was a resumption of a modernization process which Faisal had initiated earlier when he was Prime Minister from around '58 to late '60, two years, two years and half, in there. As he had done in the earlier period, Faisal now from '62 on resumed efforts at real budgetary control, had his council of ministers meeting in a businesslike fashion, taking up actions that were concrete, and seeing them through. And he personally kept tabs on everything they were doing. This was basic because it meant that the funds that were obtained from oil royalties and other sources were subjected to real controls as to

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their expenditure.

The King never liked these controls, King Saud; he fretted against them. They annoyed him, interfered with his whims, and the pressures were on him from his own family and hangers-on for enormous funds. But under Faisal they were cut to about 6 percent of the national budget; that is, what went to the royal household was reduced to about 6 percent. Faisal between '58 and '60 is supposed to have reduced it from about 60 percent to 14

percent, and when he resumed authority in '62 he reduced it to around six. Traditionally in the desert way the sheikh is the treasurer of the tribe, and he keeps the strongbox in his tent, and a trustee will have the key. How he spends that money is up to him and his wisdom with his own people because it's his and it's theirs, but it's his in trust for them. This system was obviously being abused by King Saud in a most flagrant, almost unbelievable way. Faisal brought this under control.

The first act that he did, however, was to abolish slavery formally and overtly for the first time in Saudi Arabia, slave trade and slavery. It had been withering, but never had been abolished. He did it. Then he undertook to set up councils to study the government in a fundamental way and determine the structure of the judicial authority, the executive authority, and the beginnings of a more representative legislative authority—[these] are the three basic study programs that he initiated. These modernizations were initiated and are the sole responsibility of Faisal. Along with this went a very close scrutiny of how money was spent on public works to make sure that it didn't get into the wrong hands and be wasted, that bids were really bids. And he has paid a great deal of close attention to all developmental work in public roads, airports, schools all over the country, girls' schools. A very major contribution of him and his wife, Princess Iffat [Iffat Thunayyan], Queen Iffat, is the establishment of schools for girls. Many of these girls will never wear the veil. By the time they come of age it will be passé in this very conservative country. So that these are major reforms.

However, other things come about through the dynamics of business developing. The search for water is one of the things he did, also, in agriculture, improvements based on ground water surveys and new sources being found in the desert have been fundamental to the future of the country. He wants to develop an economy which won't just end upon oil going out and things coming in. He wants more production in the country. He wants industrialization gradually developed. He wants better agriculture, because it's an artificial system when you just send out oil and import everything including all your food, or almost all of it. And this is what he's trying to correct. Well, their breaking point was there, '62.

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As regards your other question, which was.... Could you repeat it, please?

O'BRIEN: Did you see any changes in foreign policy between the Kennedy Administration and the Johnson Administration?

HART: Not anything dramatic, but, again, the death of Kennedy coincided with the end of a period, which was the period of our strongest overt support for Faisal by aircraft in the country. Shortly after his death that air unit was withdrawn; withdrawn, I think, primarily on pressure of the Joint Chiefs of Staff back here. They didn't like it out there in the first place. General LeMay [Curtis E. LeMay] didn't care for this operation one little bit.

O'BRIEN: What were his objections?



HART: Oh, he just said, "I need that air unit somewhere else. I want it. Out there it's not doing anything." Well, it was doing something political. I don't think General LeMay's political comprehensions were of as high an order as his military, and I don't think he ever quite saw the point of all this very clearly. You know, he's a pretty black-and-white sort of mind, a very military man, not very given to political uses of the military.

Well, it was withdrawn and fortunately it made it less painful that it was withdrawn at the very moment that Nasser issued his call for an Arab summit meeting in Egypt, so that it coincided well. In fact, the timing was accidental, but it was fortuitous. From then on we continued, however, our regular destroyer visits once a month, more or less.

Johnson, as President, reaffirmed Kennedy's pledge of support to Faisal in very friendly terms. The relationship, therefore, on paper was very good, and I think there was a warm feeling established between the two. And then, of course, later Faisal came to the United States and had a very good visit here with Johnson. In spite of Mayor Lindsay's [John V. Lindsay] cancellation of the dinner in New York, which marred the New York episode, nevertheless the visit was a good visit, and here in the Washington end, I think a very useful one.

O'BRIEN: Well, I'm really through.

HART: I wouldn't say that there would be any pronounced changes of policy toward Saudi Arabia. The warm support continued. The threat on the Egyptian side had diminished by then toward Saudi Arabia. Nasser had called a new tune, so that relations were easier than they had been during much of Kennedy's time.

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O'BRIEN: Well, I'm through with any real questions that I have. Is there anything you feel we've left out or would like to add?

HART: No. No, I don't think so, particularly. I have nothing special to add now, except perhaps to say that in reference to Nasser and his government since '67 the conditions of the relationship between us have changed very drastically. Not only have the formal diplomatic relations been severed, but the residual relations of an informal nature, which are made possible because we each have fourteen men in the other's country under another flag, have been very cordial. And as I look back over seventeen years of relationship with the Nasser regime, I would say the easiest period has been since June of '67, curiously enough.

Now, one can postulate that if we were back there with full diplomatic relations perhaps we could have more influence, but I could also cite many examples to suggest that that would not be easy to acquire by the restoration of formal relations, because it seems to be built into the mind of that regime, perhaps Nasser's mind, that relations are to be used for his benefit, to be exploited, really, for his benefit and for his drive toward hegemony in the neighboring Arab areas. Has he given this up? I don't know. Perhaps he has. But a great deal

would depend on that if we were to resume formal relations, because if he took our resumption of cordiality and formal relationship and perhaps even got some technical assistance or some aid—which isn't in the cards right now but might be soon—would he use that as a hunting license? It would be basic to our relationship. We've had two very bad experiences with him. I think he would like to renew relations, provided that he thinks he could get something out of it. But I don't find very much signs of over eagerness on either side right now.

O'BRIEN: Well, thank you, Ambassador Hart, for a very informative and interesting interview.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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