

The Rescue of King Hussein's Regime

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The Israeli involvement in the September 1970 crisis, and her willingness to intervene militarily in Northern Jordan against the Syrian army, in order to save King Hussein's regime, were both the result of a crucial strategic decision that had been taken exactly two years before, in September 1968. The initial choice of the Israeli government was the 'Palestinian Option,' and it took about a year to formulate a new policy, to abandon this option and to adopt instead the 'Jordanian Option,' which became the Israeli official policy in September 1968. Jordan was regarded by the Israeli policymakers as an important strategic ally. So, when the September 1970 crisis erupted, saving of the King's regime, and preventing by that the creation of a Palestinian state, or even a graver result – a takeover of Jordan by Syria, seemed to be the only logical decision. Declassified documents released by Israel's state archives reveal that the Israeli decision makers acted in a very careful and prudent way. Although they all believed that an Israeli intervention was almost inevitable, in the case the Syrians would proceed south of Irbid, or if the Iraqi forces would intervene in the battles, they were not quarrelsome. The Israelis wanted to ensure, and to receive the US commitment and obligations, to many conditions and promises prior to agree to a military intervention. They also were aware of the opportunity to upgrade Israel's status as a strategic asset for the US, and they decided to exploit it.

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Following the Six Day War of June 1967, the Israeli decision makers faced one of the critical and significant dilemmas in the short history of the country – choosing between two strategic options that will determine the future borders of Israel and Jordan, and the future relations between them, and on the same time, the fate of the 'Palestinian Problem.' The initial choice of the Israeli government was the 'Palestinian Option,' and it took about a year to formulate a new policy, to abandon this option, and to adopt instead the 'Jordanian Option,' which became the Israeli official policy in September 1968.

It was the first time, since 1948, that Israel controlled the majority of the Palestinian people, and the logical solution to the 'Palestinian problem' seemed to be one that was based on using the occupied territories as a homeland for the Palestinians. The proposals made by the participants in the cabinet's discussions during the first weeks after the Six Day War, ranged from Palestinian autonomy to an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank.

It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze in details the process in which the Israeli decision makers changed their approach, and moved from supporting the 'Palestinian Option' to the Jordanian one. However, an examination of the conditions and circumstances existed in the first year following the June 1967 War reveals that the chances of the 'Palestinian Option' were poor from the outset. Despite the fact that Israeli policymakers believed it to be practicable, the 'Palestinian Option' was doomed to failure because of factors over which they had no control.¹

When examining the obstacles along the path to implementing the Palestinian option, we can conclude that long time before September 1970, the official Israel regarded the Palestinians as rivals, and King Hussein, who was the other directly involved player in the Palestinian game, as an ally.²

THE FAILURE OF THE 'PALESTINE OPTION'

There were at least 12 factors that contributed to the failure of the implementation of the Palestinian option during the first year after the June 1967 War:

1. During the era under Jordanian rule (1949–67), the Palestinian leaders tended to be politically passive, developing dependence on outside elements.³
2. There was no Palestinian independent political infrastructure, because King Hussein prevented any political activity that would have led to the establishment of one, and because, after occupying the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Israel refused to allow the Palestinians free political activity. The result was that dependence on outside elements continued.⁴
3. The political passivity of the Palestinian leadership proved to be a serious obstacle. When the Israelis offered Palestinians leaders in the West Bank a solution based on Palestinian autonomy, they replied that the problem had to be settled not with the Palestinian Arabs, but with the entire Arab world.⁵
4. The failure of the Palestinians, in the territories to establish a central and recognized leadership, had led to the creation of an outside leadership – the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This leadership-in-exile was still in the early stages of organizing itself when the June 1967 War broke out, and it did not attain the degree of legitimacy that would later make it the accepted representative of the Palestinian people.⁶
5. In the year following the Six Day War the PLO experienced an exhausting struggle over its leadership. It was only at the beginning of 1969 that Yasir Arafat was appointed chairman of the PLO in place of Yahya Hammuda. Hence, during the crucial period of 1967–68, there was no recognized and accepted Palestinian leadership, with whom the Israelis could negotiate the Palestinian option.⁷

6. During the period of late 1967–68, in which Israeli policymakers were engaged in contacts with the West Bank leadership, al-Fatah organization (the backbone of the PLO) was carrying out terrorist activities against Israelis and against Israeli targets (within Israel and in the territories). In addition to planting explosives, the organization tried to incite the population of the West Bank to popular revolt. It was clear that these activities of the Palestinian organization did not encourage Israeli policymakers to try to negotiate with the PLO.⁸ Early in this stage, Israeli officials started developing the notion that the PLO's growing strength and its terrorist activities would lead to the overthrow of King Hussein's regime in Jordan.
7. King Hussein continued to influence political affairs on the West Bank, even after the Israeli occupation. He continued to pay the salaries of government officials who remained in the West Bank, and had a considerable influence over the weak political establishment of the West Bank.⁹
8. The secret talks between Israeli policymakers and King Hussein. As direct contact with the King developed, these policymakers started to believe that these talks would lead to the first separate peace agreement with an Arab state. This consideration alone would have been enough to justify their abandonment of the Palestinian option. Anyway, continuous dialogue with Hussein was considered to be the most successful way of deal with the terrorist activities of the Palestinians. In the beginning of 1968, a Palestinian entity was already regarded as a security threat to Israel.¹⁰
9. The Jarring mission was carried out while the Israelis were talking with the Palestinian leadership. Jarring negotiated with Israel and with Jordan, and did not promote the Palestinian option. Israel's active participation, albeit with reservations for Jarring's mission, was also responsible to a considerable degree for preventing the promotion of the option of Palestinian autonomy.¹¹
10. UN Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967 totally ignored Palestinian aspirations and spoke only of the refugee problem. On the other end, this resolution provides legitimacy to Jordan's demand for the return of the West Bank to its rule.¹²
11. The position of President Lyndon Johnson's administration influenced greatly the position of Israeli policymakers. As early as the meeting of the Israeli cabinet on 30 July 1967, Abba Eban, Israel's Foreign Minister, had told his colleagues that a special working group, appointed by Johnson and headed by former National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, had examined the idea of creating an independent Palestinian state or of establishing a canton on the West Bank, and had rejected both. Eban reported that the United States had announced that it could not provide economic support to any solution based on either of these ideas, and, therefore, it proposed that the fate of the West Bank be decided in negotiations between Israel and Jordan.¹³
12. There can be no doubt that the US rejection of the establishment of a Palestinian entity, autonomous or independent, was an important element in the process of Israel's abandoning the Palestinian option. The Israelis understood that the

United States was not prepared to by-pass Hussein in any settlement on the West Bank, and that Israel would do well to try to promote the signing of political agreements by means of a dialogue with him.

The US administration continued to support an Israeli–Jordanian settlement throughout the first year following the June 1967 War, and at no stage did Washington seriously consider the Palestinian option.

With the increase in the number of Fatah attacks against Israeli targets from across the Jordanian border, Washington took steps to see that Israel reacted with restraint, claiming that, otherwise, Israel would bring about the overthrow of King Hussein. On the eve of Prime Minister Eshkol's visit to the United States in early 1968, there were discussions in the cabinet designed to clarify the position that he would present to the President. On 19 December 1967, Eban reported that the United States had proposed to Hussein that he enter into negotiations with Israel. The Foreign Minister warned his fellow cabinet members that if Hussein approached Israel for the purpose of entering into negotiations, and was rejected, the United States 'would find out about it,' and Eshkol's trip to Washington would then end in failure. Although meetings had already been held with Hussein, the sides had not reached any clear-cut political agreement at that time.¹⁴

The accumulation of all these factors led the Israeli government to abandon the Palestinian option and to adopt a new one – the Jordanian option. The main principle of this option, formulated by Yigal Allon, Minister of Labor, was handing over to the Kingdom of Jordan most of the West Bank, and to annex to Israel only a small portion of it (the Jordan Valley, Gush Etzion, and East Jerusalem.)

This was the second 'Allon Plan,' and the beginning of the Jordanian option. (The first 'Allon Plan' from July 1967, was based on the Palestinian option, offering a Palestinian autonomy in most of the territory of the West Bank.) The result of the new Jordanian concept supposed to be a peace agreement between Israel and Jordan.

Allon was ready to consider the Jordanian option, despite his negative attitude toward the Jordanian King, because of his negative role in the May–June 1967 crisis, and his decision to attack Israel in June. The new idea of Allon was very appealing to the Israeli decision makers. Most of the West Bank would be turned over to King Hussein, thus freeing Israel from having to deal with the Palestinian problem. Allon believed that handing over such a large portion of the West Bank to Jordan would lead the King to sign a peace treaty with Israel. Thus, on 27 February 1968, Allon amended the plan bearing his name. The essence of the amendment was the decision to break away from the clear commitment to the Palestinian option.¹⁵

In April 1968, there was already a consensus among the senior Israeli policymakers that in the next meeting with King Hussein (which was supposed to take place in the coming months) the revised 'Allon Plan' would be presented to the King as the Israeli official policy.

Toward the end of September 1968, the meeting was held, in London, with the King. The 'Allon Plan' was presented to the King for the first time, as the basis for a

peace agreement. (From the Israeli side the participants were the Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, Yigal Allon, and the Prime Minister's office – Director General, Yaakov Herzog. On the Jordanian side, the King accompanied by his adviser, Zayid Rifa'i.)¹⁶

The meeting, and its results, made clear that there were wide gaps between the King's views on the future settlement in the West Bank and those of Israel. It was apparent that Hussein was unable, perhaps unwilling, to adopt the Israeli suggested solution, mainly because he thought the Arab world would view an Israel–Jordan agreement as a betrayal of the King.¹⁷

It is important to emphasize, in the context of the September 1970 crisis, that during the meeting, Allon analyzed the geostrategic situation in the Middle East, in order to clarify to the King that he needs Israel on his side. Allon described the co-operation between Arab states, such as Egypt and Syria, with the Soviet Union as a communist threat to the region and said that a settlement between Israel and Jordan must be viewed against this regional background. Allon hinted at the dangers of this Arab-Soviet co-operation, and the dangers of the Palestinian aspirations, for the Jordanian regime and the King himself. 'If we reach an agreement,' he said, in what seems to be a prophetic statement, 'the forces of Israel will serve as a guarantee of the integrity of the region against external intervention and also against domestic instability.'

Despite the failure of signing a peace agreement with King Hussein, the meetings with him did not stop. They continued in a rather orderly fashion, based on the Israeli–Jordanian orientation. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was regarded by the Israeli policymakers, by that time, as an important strategic ally. Thus, when the September 1970 crisis erupted, saving of the King's regime, and preventing by that the creation of a Palestinian state, or even a grave result – a takeover of Jordan by Syria, seemed to be the only logical decision.

The September 1970 crisis was not the first time, since the London meeting of September 1968 that King Hussein referred to this meeting by asking Israel's help to guarantee 'the integrity of the region against external intervention and also against domestic instability,' as promised by Allon. The first time was on 17 February 1970, during the height of the war of attrition between Egypt and Israel. Hussein, using the services of the Americans, through the US embassy in Tel Aviv, approached Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban and asked that Israel not take advantage of Jordanian military redeployment geared to counter PLO efforts to overthrow his regime, and that Israel not be provoked into retaliation against Jordanian forces by terrorist activities.¹⁸

As Perlmutter reveals, the King requested further that Jordan make use of IDF intelligence should outside forces, meaning Syria, invade Jordan. The Israeli reply was swift: It would not take advantage of Jordanian border redeployment, it would be willing to help Jordan against outside forces, but it would retaliate against terrorist activities, although not against Jordanian force.¹⁹

Details about this event can be found in a top secret message from 15 April 1970, sent to the Israeli ambassador to Washington, Itzhak Rabin, from the Foreign

Office. The message was a report on the conversation between the Israeli Defense Minister, Moshe Dayan, and US Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco. Dayan raised the question of 'the future of the Kingdom of Jordan,' and noted that 'the confrontation that did not happen in February is approaching.' Then Dayan analyzed the options for intervention in Jordan in the case the King's regime will be in jeopardy. 'In time that any direct American military help to the regime in Jordan will turned out to be a failure, and will be not practical, Israel will be ready, and able, in the context of her war against the Iraqis and the terrorists, that act against our settlements, to hit these inimical forces, and as such to alleviate on the struggle of the King against them.' But, Dayan added, 'Israel will not operate [in Jordan] without the blessing and the support of the US.' Sisco responded that 'this is an interesting thought.'²⁰ The seeds of the US administration policy regarding the role of Israel in saving the Hashemite regime in Jordan, were planted in this meeting.

THE ERUPTION OF THE SEPTEMBER CRISIS

When the September crisis was erupted, Henry Kissinger, then the National Security Adviser to President Nixon, already knew that Israel is ready to use its military in order to save the Jordanian King. (Sisco was, during the September crisis, a member of the WSAG [Washington Special Action Group] – the NSC [National Security Council] subcommittee for contingency planning and crisis management.) At that time the only Israeli condition for carrying out an Israeli intervention in Jordan was the blessing of the US president.

The Jordanian crisis erupted amid a very intensive American political activity in the Middle East. By the end of 1969, the Jarring Mission has reached an impasse. The Arab States would not negotiate with Israel directly or indirectly, and the War of Attrition was in its peak. Palestinian terrorists were engaged in sabotage actions against Israel from Jordan and Syria, assisted by the armed forces of those two countries. Prime Minister Golda Meir visited the United States in late September 1969, and met with President Nixon in Washington on 25 and 26 September. While no formal announcement was made, it was assumed that a good understanding had been reached. But, on 9 December 1969, Secretary of State William Rogers, addressing the Galaxy Conference on Adult Education in Washington, made a number of proposals for a Middle East settlement, going into details on the future borders of Israel. The section dealing with the Middle East, became known as The 'Rogers Plan.' During the months following the declaration of the Rogers Plan, the goals of the administration's policy, based on the strategy that Kissinger formulated as an alternative to this plan, were to pull Egypt away from the Soviet Union into the US orbit of influence.

Henry Kissinger explained in a background briefing in June 1970: 'We are trying to get a [Middle East] settlement in such a way that the moderate regimes are strengthened, and not the radical regimes. We are trying to expel the Soviet military presence. . . .'²¹

‘We could not allow Hussein to be overthrown by Soviet-inspired insurrection;’ wrote President Nixon in his memoirs, ‘If it succeeded, the entire Middle East might erupt in war . . . it was like a ghastly game of dominoes, with a nuclear war waiting at the end.’²²

In his book, Kissinger describes in details the strategy: ‘an inconclusive course that over time was bound to induce at least some Arab leaders to reconsider the utility of relying on Soviet arms and radical posturing to achieve their ends. Once it became clear – for whatever reason – that a settlement could not be extorted from us, Arab leaders would gradually learn that Soviet pressure on us and their own intransigence only produce stagnation. They would, I thought, have to come to us in the end. So in 1969, not without debate and much hesitation, the basis was laid for later reversal of alliances in the Middle East.’²³

In this strategy Jordan under King Hussein had an important role. Saving the King’s regime became a crucial component of the Kissinger’s design. ‘Until that challenge was resolved,’ writes Kissinger, ‘no peace initiative had any chance. Israel would never discuss new borders with a government not in control of its own country.’²⁴

On 19 June 1970, Secretary Rogers announced a new plan. It contained an acceptance by Israel and Egypt of a 90 day cease-fire and of a military standstill zone on each side of the Suez Canal; Israel, Egypt, and Jordan would again seek Ambassador Jarring’s good offices to reach an agreement based on Resolution 242.

King Hussein was the most responsive. He wanted to endorse the Rogers Plan, but he knew that such ‘a betrayal’ of the Palestinians could cost him his throne. With each month, more Palestinians in Jordan were drawn to the program of the *fedayeen*. Already Irbid, Jerash, and other cities in northern Jordan were controlled by Palestinian guerrillas. Before he could accept the Rogers Plan he had to try once more, as he had tried in November 1969, to subdue the *fedayeen*. On 6 June 1970, the Jordanian army attacked the Palestinian guerrilla base at Zerqa and shelled the nearby refugee camps. The resistance of the Palestinian organizations forced Hussein to back down and withdraw his troops.

When Hussein failed to defeat the Palestinian organizations in Jordan, the United States stepped up its drive to persuade President Nasser of Egypt to accept the Rogers Plan. If Nasser – the historic ‘friend’ of the Palestinians – accepted the plan, then Hussein could do so more easily. By the summer of 1970 the ‘war of attrition’ between Egypt and Israel had gone far beyond the limited war Nasser’s army was capable of waging. Already the Egyptian people were pressing for a settlement that returned Egypt’s land or total mobilization against Israel. The United States offered him a way out of the dilemma with the Rogers Plan. Nasser endorsed it on 24 July 1970. The end of the ‘War of Attrition’ between Israel and Egypt would allow Hussein to attack the Palestinian organizations in Jordan.

On 29 August 1970, Hussein officially accepted the Rogers Plan. This declaration worsened the crisis, and for the Palestinians it was another proof that Hussein’s Government is not a legitimate Arab regime any more.²⁵

After obtaining further clarification, Israel accepted the Rogers plan in principle. It was also accepted by Egypt and Jordan and the cease-fire went into effect on the midnight of 7 August.

But on that night, aided and abetted by the Soviet Union, Egypt began to move heavy weapons and constructed new sites for SA-2 and SA-3 missiles in the area declared to be a standstill military zone within 50km to the east and west of the Canal. This was a flagrant and extremely grave violation of the cease-fire. On 13 August, Defense Minister, Dayan, informed the Knesset of it. Israel complained to the US which, on 19 August, announced that there had been a forward deployment of missiles, but it was not until 3 September that the Department of State confirmed that there had been breaches of the cease-fire and standstill agreement. On 6 September, Israel announced that in view of the new situation created along the Suez Canal, it was suspending its participation in the Jarring talks. Exactly on that day (6 September) the Jordanian crisis approached its climax, when members of the PLFP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) hijacked several aircraft, two of them (an American TWA 707 and a Swissair DC-80) flown to Dawson Field, a former RAF base in Zarqa, Some 30 miles from Amman. Three days later a British VC-10 was also hijacked and joined the others in Dawson.

The events in Jordan interrupted the implementation of the US policy. A victory of the Palestinians in Jordan and the overthrow of King Hussein's regime could put an end to the new US strategy in the Middle East. Kissinger wrote:

The United States was getting ready to press Israel for negotiations in which Jordan was slated to participate, looking toward withdrawal from the West Bank. If left undisturbed, the process had many hopeful elements for the Arabs. Israel's military predominance along the Canal had been broken; pressures on Israel were certain to multiply once negotiations started. But the extremists among the fedayeen had their eyes elsewhere; their goal was not peace with Israel but its destruction . . . they sought a base under their control from which they could mount the decisive attack on Israel and destroy it. . . . The Palestinians were also gradually gaining ground in Jordan . . . and the crisis they produced, ironically enough, handed the United States the opportunity to recoup much of what had been lost in the hesitations of the previous month [the failure to prevent Egypt to infringe the cease-fire of 7 August], and so open the road for the diplomacy of the years that followed.²⁶

The Jordanian crisis, and the fear that King Hussein would be overthrown, was a source of a great concern both in Israel and in the US, due to the negative influence of this on the stability of the regimes in other pro-western countries in the region. In a message sent by the intelligence unit of the Israeli Foreign Ministry to the embassy in London, on 11 September 1970, there was an observation saying that:

It seems that developments in Jordan will influence also Lebanon, and the achievements of the saboteurs (the term that was used by the Israelis in referring

to the members of the Palestinian organizations) in Jordan could deter the elected president from being tough [with the Palestinian organizations in Lebanon], what could have led to a deterioration in Lebanon too.²⁷

In a secret message, sent by the Ministry to the Israeli embassies in Turkey, Iran, Greece, and Cyprus, on 27 September, the analyst at the Middle East branch wrote: 'Had Hussein fell, without the US assistance, it could hurt severely the chances of the existence of independent Lebanon, Saudi-Arabia, Kuwait (Iraqi involvement), and the Gulf States.'²⁸

Another concern of the US administration was that the Hashemite regime would be replaced by a regime closely linked to Moscow.²⁹

The shaky Hashemite regime was also a matter of concern to Israel's policymakers, especially since the introduction of the Rogers Plan. Because Jordan was one of the parties to the future agreements with Israel, and since the intentions of the Palestinian *fedayeen* in Jordan were known, it was of the highest importance for the Israelis to clarify the US position and intentions regarding a scenario in which the Jordanian regime could not deal effectively with the Palestinian organizations (the common term for these organizations was at that time *fedayeen*) and they will continue in the terrorist attacks on Israel from Jordanian territory. The question arises, could Israel intervene in Jordanian affairs in this case?

Towards the end of July 1970, Ambassador Rabin sent a list of questions to Sisco, on issues regarding the position of the US administration on the implementation of the Rogers Plan. On 27 July Rabin sent a top secret message to the ministry in Jerusalem, detailing Sisco's answers. Answer number 4 dealt with Jordan. 'Government of Jordan has accepted the limited cease-fire. Its response avoids obligating the fedayeen. We think the government of Jordan must and should take every feasible step to obtain compliance by the fedayeen. Both Israel and the US know, however, that Jordan's capacity to prevent the fedayeen from violating the cease-fire is limited. If the fedayeen violate the cease-fire, Israel would be entitled to respond in a commensurate way against the fedayeen in self defense.'³⁰

The Israeli response to these answers had been sent to Rabin, on the same day (27 July) who read them to Sisco over the phone. 'With respect to the US reply on the Jordan-Israel cease-fire, the Israeli position is: As long as Jordan does not assume a commitment for a total and comprehensive cease-fire, obligating it to put an end to all acts of violence from its territory, including those perpetrated by fedayeen, the Government of Jordan cannot be considered a partner to the cease-fire or to a peace negotiation.'³¹

The day after (28 July) Rabin met with Rogers, and sent another top secret message to Jerusalem. 'The secretary said that they are worried of the clause that relates to the incidence of the cease-fire in the Jordanian sector. He indicated that Hussein is not able to affirm openly that the cease-fire will apply to the fedayeen. If Nasser and Jordan will keep the cease-fire and only the fedayeen will violate it, then Israel will be in a good situation. The secretary continued that according to their

answers to our questions it is clear that then Israel is free to operate against the fedayeen according to the right of self defense.³²

The story of Israeli–American–Jordanian collusion in 1970 has already been told in detail in the memoirs of Henry Kissinger and Itzhak Rabin.³³ Yet, Garfinkle argues that ‘the Jordan Crisis of September 1970 is one of the most frequently mentioned, but least studied, episodes in the recent history of United States Middle East policy.’³⁴ This claim is even truer when we refer to the studies of the Israeli policy making process. Few studies had been conducted on the Israeli decision making process during the September 1970 crisis, and most of these studies are based on memoirs of the participants, or on non-Israeli sources.³⁵ ‘The truth about the Jordan Crisis is more subtle, more elusive, and more interesting than the contending images that have arisen,’ rightly claims Garfinkle.³⁶

Declassified documents released by Israel’s state archives allow us to draw a broader picture, and to analyze the intensive secret deliberations that took place in Israel during the crucial days of the crisis. The documents reveal that the Israeli decision makers acted in a very careful and prudent way. Although they all believed that an Israeli intervention was almost inevitable, in the case the Syrians would proceed south of Irbid, or if the Iraqi forces would intervene in the battles, they were not quarrelsome. They wanted to ensure, and to receive the US commitment and obligations, to many conditions and promises prior to agree to a military intervention. They also were aware of the opportunity to upgrade Israel’s status as a strategic asset for the US, and they decided to exploit it.

During the first stages of the September crisis, Israel was reluctant to intervene. The position of the Israeli decision makers was that as long as there is no real risk to the King’s regime, and as long as Israel’s security is not endangered, it is better to follow the developments and wait. Yet, the Israelis wanted to put pressure on the King, in order to ensure that he would solved the hijacking crisis and not give up to the Palestinians. On 12 September Israel tried to send a message to the King through the US. The message referred both to the hijacking and to the strengthening power of the Palestinians in Jordan. Israel demanded the King to restore law and order in Jordan, and warned that she could not stand aloof if dangerous events would occur, and she ‘will take the necessary political means.’ The Americans refused to deliver the message to the King, because it contained, as they explained, a threat against his regime.³⁷

In a meeting between Arthur Lurie, assistant director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and an advisor from the British embassy in Tel Aviv, on 12 September, Lurie explained that the Israeli position is to ‘stand aloof.’ But, if the saboteurs will feel free to resume their attacks, and in intensified rate, on Israel from the Jordanian border, ‘it should be clear that we will not sit idle.’³⁸

On 17 September a Ministerial Committee assembled in Jerusalem to discuss the Jordanian crisis. The ministers decided to authorize the acting Prime Minister, Allon, after consultations with the Defense Minister and the Chief of Staff, to initiate an air strike against the Iraqi or Syrian forces, in case they would intervene to help the Palestinians. The committee also decided that the condition for an Israeli

intervention in Jordan was 'A request from King Hussein to Israel, in the support of the Americans, or in their knowledge.'³⁹

In a meeting, on 18 September, between Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir (who left Israel for a visit to the US on 16 September) and President Nixon, in the White House, the Jordanian crisis was mentioned briefly. Most of their talk concerned Israeli aid requests and Soviet–Egyptian violations of the cease-fire along the Suez Canal.⁴⁰

The President told Golda Meir: 'I have a real personal interest in the events in the Middle East, and especially on the current events in Jordan. I know that you have problems with the King, but he is much better than the *fedayeen*. One of the journalists asked me, in Chicago, why we won't allow Israel to intervene in Jordan. I told him that Israel can destroy Jordan, Syrian and Iraq in one afternoon, but we should not take any step of intervention that will harm the King.'⁴¹

The President referred to an off-the-record meeting that he had the day before (17 September) with the editors of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, in which he told them that if Iraq or Syria intervened in Jordan only the Israelis or the US could stop them; he preferred that the US do it.⁴²

According to Kissinger, who was participating in the meeting, Nixon said that he hoped Israel would do nothing precipitately. The Prime Minister assured the President that Israel would not move without informing the US and that it saw no need to do so.⁴³

Even as late as 20 September, the Israeli position was still very cautious. Allon, the acting Prime Minister (Golda Meir was in the State, as aforesaid), said, on a radio interview, that 'we can afford to be quit, we are watching from the side, although we are not indifferent.'⁴⁴

At that stage of the crisis, Israel was still reluctant to intervene militarily in Jordan, and the President opposed, sturdily, to an Israeli intervention.⁴⁵

THE ISRAELI POLICY CHANGES

Four developments led Israel to change its policy, and to be ready, even eager, to intervene in the Jordanian crisis:

1. The Syrians' invasion of the northern part of Jordan, and their success in occupying Irbid and Ramtha. From Irbid a rapid Syrian attack could reach the outskirts of the capital Amman within 24 hours;
2. The US president's request to intervene;
3. The US promise to prevent Soviet interference if Israel invaded Jordan;
4. The request of King Hussein from Israel to save his regime.

On the morning of 18 September a small Syrian armored force cross the border with Jordan near Ramtha and headed for Irbid. The Jordanian 40th Armored Brigade engaged the invading force in fierce combat, knocked out some of its tanks and manage to block its advance. A day later a second incursion cross the border but on a larger scale – almost 300 tanks and a mechanized infantry brigade.

This Syrian move was regarded by Israel as a dramatic change, and a dangerous one. In an analysis, following the Syrian invasion, the intelligence unit of the Foreign Ministry found:

- A. A fundamental change with the invasion of armored Syrian forces to Irbid.
- B. The Syrian move aggravates the situation:
 - 1. Difficulties of the regime to repel the invading force.
 - 2. The rise of the morale of the saboteurs.
 - 3. The escalation of the inter-Arabs pressures on Hussein.
 - 4. Possibility of deterioration while drawing the Iraqi forces into action.
 - 5. The aggravation of the challenges in front of the US and the USSR.
- C. The Syrian intervention cast a shadow on the other players in the region.
- D. The regime continued last night in the 'purification' of Amman. The Syrian intervention disrupts possibilities of the action against the saboteurs in the north. The Jordanian army is inferior numerical in the north and is jaded after several days of fighting.
- E. ...The general situation complicates and the players that are trying to achieve a settlement are weak.

After the Syrian invasion of Jordan, most of Israel's senior decision makers started to reconcile with the idea that if the Syrian tanks would continue to advance to the south, and occupied more chunks of Jordan, then there will be no other option for Israel but to intervene militarily. This perception can be detect in the message that Yigal Allon, the acting Prime minister, sent on 20 September, to ambassador Rabin, titled 'top secret' and 'urgent.' 'For your eyes only,' wrote Allon, 'but, if the Kingdom of Jordan will be disintegrated and her neighbors will "bite" pieces from her, we reserve the right to act according to our understanding.'⁴⁷

Another factor that influenced the Israeli position was the change in the US attitude toward an Israeli intervention in Jordan. At the beginning of the crisis, President Nixon opposed an Israeli military intervention. As Kissinger wrote, 'he wanted to use American ground forces.'⁴⁸

Only in the evening of 20 September, Nixon changed his mind. In a meeting with Kissinger in the White House, he told his National Security Adviser that 'if there were a military reaction it should *not* be by us.'⁴⁹

Following this change, the President approved the WASG's recommendations that called for the US to ask Israel to intervene in Jordan. That night (20 September) Kissinger placed a call to Rabin, who was attending a dinner in New York honoring Israeli Prime Minister, Golda Meir. After Rabin was located, he called Kissinger back (at about 10:00 p.m.) and was asked 'what information Israel had on Syrian moves.' Rabin said that Israel estimated some 200 Syrian tanks to be in the area of Irbid. Kissinger asked whether Israel could fly some reconnaissance at day break (there was already morning in the Middle East) 'and give us its judgment.' Rabin asked whether the US would look favorably on an Israeli air strike if the

intelligence indicated significant Syrian advances. 'I replied,' wrote Kissinger, 'that we would prefer to make this judgment after analyzing the results of the reconnaissance.'⁵⁰

Only 35 minutes later, Kissinger placed another call to Rabin, after receiving an urgent message from King Hussein, which spoke 'of serious deterioration following a new massive Syrian invasion. Jordanian forces were no longer in contact with each other. Irbid was occupied. The troops in the capital were disquieted.' According to the King's view, 'air strike was imperative to save his country.'

In his second call Kissinger told Rabin that he could inform him that if Israeli reconnaissance confirmed what he had told him, 'we would look favorably upon an Israeli air attack. We would make good the material losses, and we would do our utmost to prevent Soviet interference.' Rabin said that he would have to consult his Prime Minister.⁵¹

In his memoirs Rabin presents a little different version of these events. He describes how he was asked to call Kissinger immediately. 'When the call put through, he spoke with a ring of urgency in his voice: 'King Hussein has approached us, describing the situation of his forces, and asked us to transmit his request that your air force attack the Syrians in northern Jordan. I need an immediate reply.'

'I'm surprised to hear the US passing on messages of this kind like some sort of mailman,' Rabin told Kissinger. 'I will not even submit the request to Mrs. Meir before I know what your government thinks. Are you recommending that we respond to the Jordanian request?'

'You place me in a difficult position,' Rabin quotes Kissinger, 'I can't answer you on the spot. Perhaps in another half-hour.'⁵²

Rabin reported on Kissinger's call to Allon, at 23:30 New York time (06:30 Israel time). In his message Rabin told Allon that Kissinger informed him that the King had sent another message at 03:00 Jordan time, in which Hussein emphasized that the situation was deteriorating, Irbid was occupied by the Syrians, and the result was a 'disastrous effect' on the Jordanian army. The King was asking an immediate ground and aerial intervention, especially aerial. 'Kissinger clarified,' wrote Rabin, 'that the Americans are asking from us an aerial intervention [and not a ground one].'⁵³

On the morning of 21 September, at 05:15 Washington time (12:15 p.m. Israel time), Rabin called Alexander Haig, who was Kissinger's military advisor on the National Security Council staff, and told him that Israel did not consider air strike alone adequate. Ground action might also be necessary. 'Israel would appreciate the American view within two or three hours.'⁵⁴

It seems that Rabin's call to Haig was the result of a secret meeting of an ad hoc informal group (a form of an ad hoc 'kitchen cabinet') in Jerusalem on the morning of the 21st. Participated in the meeting were the acting Prime Minister, Allon, the Defense Minister, Moshe Dayan, the Chief of Staff, Haim Bar-Lev, and the military secretaries of the Prime Minister and the Defense Minister, Brigadier Generals Israel Lior and Shlomo Raviv. This meeting is the key of understanding the Israeli decision-making process in the September crisis.

The participants already knew of the King's request for help (as noted above, Kissinger told Rabin about the King's message). They also were aware of President Nixon's new approach to an Israeli intervention. In a matter of fact, since it was clear that the US administration is asking Israel for its help, there was no way that the decision makers would reject this request.

The Chief of Staff made it clear that there was no operational problem to use the air force to attack the Syrian forces in Jordan, but in his estimate this move would have not led to a decisive victory.

Dayan said that the Prime Minister should clarify to the Americans that their request from Israel, to use only the air force, is in his view unacceptable. An aerial attack could be carried out by the aircraft of the Sixth Fleet, Dayan said, and there is no need to use the Israeli air force for this. If Israel would operate only the air force, Dayan emphasized, that would cause negative results. To operate the air force on behalf of the Americans, and to absorb criticism from the entire world 'is not logical,' concluded Dayan.

Allon tried to lead the discussion toward a clear decision – to make the appropriate arrangements for a military operation in northern Jordan. Allon suggested that an urgent meeting with the King would set up, in which the Israelis would tell him that Israel was willing to assist him. To that Dayan agreed and said that the Israeli military operation on Jordanian territory should be co-ordinated with Hussein, 'otherwise there would be a negative effect upon us.'

The participants formulated a secret message to Rabin in which he was asked to receive clarifications from the US administration. In a top secret message, Allon reported on the meeting and told him that according to the estimate in Israel 'an Israeli military operation, to prevent a Syrian, or Iraqi, takeover of northern Jordan, would require using of massive military forces, which could then lead to an all out war, including in the Suez canal front. . . . Therefore, the Israeli Government would like to receive clarifications and obligations, in order to discuss the American request in a positive tendency.'

Allon listed eight points that were required an American respond (Kissinger referred to them as 'a set of questions about American policy in the case of hostilities').⁵⁵

The declassified documents released by Israel State Archives reveal, for the first time, what those points were:

1. Will the US agree to approach Israeli formally in this matter?
2. Will the King agree to request our assistance and undertake to institute methods of communications and coordination between us?
3. How will the US act to prevent Soviet participation or involvement?
4. Is it understood that US will side with us in the international political arena including the use of the veto in the Security Council, on the grounds that the Syrian invasion of Jordan not only violates Jordan's integrity but threatens Israel's security and therefore entitles Israel to take actions in her defense?
5. Is it clear that Israel should not be held responsible for the fate of the hostages? (The passengers of the aircraft that had been hijacked to Jordan.)

6. Is it understood that the US public statements on all matters pertaining to above questions shall be made on highest levels and not lower than Secretary of State? In full coordination with regards to their content and their timing.
7. Answers to above questions should be in the form of a secret memorandum of understanding.
8. Although it is clear that an Israeli operation must be also a ground one, and in the big scope, the tendency in the government is toward a positive response to the request regarding military operation – if we will receive satisfactory answers to our questions.⁵⁶

Without waiting to the American answers, the Israelis had staged a noisy, obvious, and ostentatious mobilization along the Golan Heights to achieve a maximum deterrent effect. In a matter of fact, the IDF started on 18 September a massive mobilization drive, which included 400 tanks and two armored brigades.⁵⁷

The forces were deployed on the borders with Syria and Jordan. This act of mobilization was performed overtly, as a signal aimed at the Syrians. On the same time Israeli fighter jets flew over Amman and over the Syrian forces in Northern Jordan. Not a single shot was fired.⁵⁸

Part of the answers to the eight points was given to Rabin right after he delivered the questions to the Americans. At 12:00 (19:00 Israel time), Joseph Sisco met with the Israeli Ambassador and told him that he was authorized to convey the following reply to the matters raised by Rabin. The ambassador detailed Sisco's answers in another message written in English:

1. US agrees in principle to operation by air and land. This is subject to final review this evening.
2. US instructed that our message to the King requesting meeting with him be passed on to him. US Ambassador [in Amman] is also to seek King's views as regards air and/or ground action. If King disagrees, that will be taken into account.
3. US view of action as follows:
 - A. It must be effective. Strongly prefer air action but since this is your operation – it is also your prerogative to determine method.
 - B. Action should be directed at Syrians in Jordan and not in Syria, since the problem is the Syrian invasion of Jordan.

On this Rabin responded:

1. To eliminate the Syrians in Jordan will require massive operation. Syrians have concentrated very considerable forces consisting of armor, artillery and infantry.
2. We cannot tell the reaction of other Arab states.
3. One can never tell what the reaction is going to be along the Suez Canal and the Soviet action has to be taken into account.⁵⁹

In the meantime, through the American ambassador in Tel Aviv, Allon sent a friendly message to the King at 21:13 (14:13 Washington time): 'Following developments with deep sympathy and goodwill. In view clarify situation suggest immediate meeting with you or with your authorized competent representative. Place time your convenience.' An hour later came the reply:

Extremely grateful to old friend for concern. Situation very grave up north. Trying to reorganize and given a chance we may be able to contain threat. However, serious threat of a breakthrough does exist. And this will require immediate action. I would have love to have this chance to meet, but physically impossible at this time. Will arrange meeting as soon as possible. Meantime please keep in touch through this channel. Best regards and wishes.⁶⁰

That afternoon in Washington was very busy in negotiations between Israel and the Administration. A few hours after the noon Rabin–Sisco meeting, there was another meeting to refine the details of both sides' positions on the Israeli military action.

In another top secret message from 17:30 Rabin reported on that meeting (in English). 'Sisco said that there would be a high level meeting this evening, and he would, therefore, like to update information beforehand.

'Sisco said that Zayid Rifa'i telephoned and transmitted message from Hussein to Allon (in which the king asked for Israeli help).

'Rifa'i added to the message that Jordanian army have given the Syrians a bloody nose this afternoon by employing air force and ground forces. . . Sisco was requesting us to explore with them another possibility – and to consult with Jerusalem on it. As the alternative to the proposition which is under consideration at present, Sisco wanted us to examine the pros and cons politically and militarily of an Israeli operation in the Golan Height to relieve the pressure on Jordan. He wanted this to be explored informally.'

'Rabin replied that politically such a move would cause the results that Sisco himself had pointed out this morning – Sisco had stressed that US government consider a military operation outside Jordan as more risky than inside Jordan. Furthermore, such a move cannot be limited to a small scale diversionary action.'

'Sisco repeated the question, whether a diversionary move on Golan Height would have to be substantial so as to succeed. Rabin replied that he would convey the proposal but he personally did not believe in diversionary action if it is not accompanied by a move against the main goal.'

'Sisco said that in a move against Syria there would be the question of Soviet nervousness which is a political risk as we know from the 1967 experience. However, from the point of view of Amman and the King's position, it would be more desirable politically that a move should be made outside of Jordan and it would be less a liability for the King.'

'Rabin delivered the questions from Jerusalem [the eight points that Allon delivered to Rabin earlier that day] in the form of a verbal note. He noted that if there will be satisfactory answers to these questions, he had reason to believe that Israel's response to the US proposition would be favorable.'⁶¹

Fifteen minutes later (at 18:00 Washington time) another message was sent from the Israeli Embassy to Jerusalem. It was a report of yet another meeting between Rabin, Kissinger, and Sisco. Rabin was analyzing the situation in Jordan saying that based on the information he received from the Israeli intelligence 'in Northern Jordan, there is a chance to the Jordanians to hold on, on condition that there will be no Iraqi intervention.'

'Right now,' Rabin added, 'there is an impasse. But it should be clear that the Syrians have the possibility to send more forces to Jordan considering the fact that they have 900 tanks between Damascus and the Israeli lines (in the Golan Heights.)'

Then they were talking on the Israeli questions regarding the American request of an Israeli military operation. Kissinger referred to the 'Soviet issue,' and said that (the report uses English in quoting Kissinger) 'I understand your concern about the Soviets. I do not consider it impossible that this is a Soviet trap. You are concerned and so are we. One thing is very clear to me that if it (the action) is to be done, it has got to succeed. ... The Soviets may be playing this for a showdown. 300 Syrian tanks don't start moving on their own. We have other evidence from other areas that they are pushing for a showdown. Your existence is involved here. The President's views are in my judgment that if the King approved your ground action the President would welcome it and take necessary measures.'

'There are three possibilities now,' continued Kissinger, '1. King may ask for your support. We have watched the Soviets closely for months now. We have seen enough to convince us that we have to face them. 2. King collapses. In my judgment you will then have to move and we will then have to decide how we face the Soviets. 3. King compromises. This is the most complicated proposition.'

At the end of the meeting Kissinger told Rabin that Israel should not 'try to extract too many conditions before moving. Conditions do not mean much anymore. Facts count. If you lick the Syrians that will count.'⁶²

Later that evening (21:30 Washington time) Kissinger called Rabin and told him that after long considerations the administration had formulated the answers to the Israeli questions, that were delivered earlier by Rabin to Sisco. Kissinger added that the answers would be given to the Israelis by the State Department.

The new declassified documents reveal that there was a document detailing the American answer to the Israeli conditions. This is in contradiction with the consensus among the scholars who studies the Jordanian crisis, and who claim that the agreement between the US and Israel was not put into writing.⁶³

An hour after Kissinger's call to Rabin (at 22:30), Roger Davis, Deputy Secretary of State delivered the answers to Shlomo Argov, the political advisor at the Israeli Embassy, in a form of a blank paper without a signature. This paper has been referring to as the 'oral paper.'

In another top secret message the embassy reported to Jerusalem on the American answers:

- Q. Will the US agree to approach Israeli formally in this matter?
- A. We have indicated in our conversations our agreement in principle to the operation under discussion. If decisions are taken to conduct such an operation, they should be on the basis of those conversations and the fact that our common interests would be served.
- Q. Will the King agree to request our assistance and undertake to institute methods of communications and coordination between us?
- A. We do not know the answer to this question. Israel is aware of informal exchange of messages between Deputy Prime Minister Allon and the king which we conveyed. With respect to ground operation – the only indication we have of the Jordan attitude on this question was a statement by Zaid Rifa'i to our ambassador that Israeli ground operations are fine in the area as long as they are not here in Jordan. We are seeking clarification on this question from the King. Israeli air strikes have been requested or approved on several occasions by the King.
- Q. How will the US act to prevent Soviet participation or involvement?
- A. On September 20 the US Government called upon the Soviet Government to take appropriate steps in Damascus to bring about withdrawal of Syrian forces from Jordan. Secretary Rogers made a public statement to this effect on September 20. We have and will continue to make clear to the Soviet our support for Israel's security and integrity and its right to live within defensible borders. In the present crisis, the US augmented the Sixth Fleet. It has also taken other readiness measures. These clearly imply a decision not to permit Soviet intervention against Israel in the condition under discussion. As for specific measures the US may take to prevent Soviet intervention, this would depend on the circumstances and the situation that exist at the time. We have contingency plans for these eventualities.
- Q. Is it understood that US will side with us in the international political arena including the use of the veto in the Security Council, on the grounds that the Syrian invasion of Jordan not only violate Jordan's integrity but threatens Israel's security and therefore entitles Israel to take actions in her defense?
- A. We would be prepare to take the position publically, including in the Security Council, that such action by Israel represented legitimate self defense, since the Syrian invasion of Jordan threatened Israel's security. While we cannot state precisely how we would vote in the Security

Council, on any particular resolution in the absence of precise knowledge of terms of that resolution, we would be prepared to veto a resolution condemned Israel for this act of self defense.

Q. Is it clear that Israel should not be held responsible for the fate of the hostages?

A. The US shall not hold Israel responsible for the fate of the hostages resulting from Israeli action against Syrian forces in Jordan.

Q. Is it understood that the US public statements on all matters pertaining to above questions shall be made on highest levels and not lower than Secretary of State?

A. We agree that major US policy statements on this matter would be made at the highest level.

Q. Answers to above questions should be in the form of a secret memorandum of understanding.

A. We believe that the oral answers to the above questions are clear and should not be in the form of a secret memorandum of understanding.⁶⁴

Forty-five minutes later (at 23:45 Washington time, 06:45 Israel time) Rabin sent another top secret message to Israel in which he gave his analysis of the American position, and delivered his recommendations to the Government in Jerusalem.

‘It is the first time,’ wrote Rabin, ‘that the US is asking Israel, explicitly, to perform initiated military operation. The American request was aimed at the first stage only to an air strike against the Syrian forces in Jordan. However, after Israel clarified that without a ground operation it would be impossible to achieve the goals of the operation, the US agreed to request an operation in a larger scale.’

Rabin had reservations about the American position. ‘The answers that they gave us are unsatisfactory, in my opinion. Nevertheless, I do not think that there is any chance to achieve a formal agreement between us, in light of the current situation in the Middle East. . . . I think that in the current situation there is no need to take the severe risks that are involved in a military action, in the wide scope that we are referring to. What I mean is the entanglement in a military action that could lead to deterioration in all fronts, to many casualties, and to the risk of a limited confrontation with the USSR.’

Therefore, Rabin continued, ‘I recommend that in this stage we will notify the US that it will be better for us to wait and see what will be the developments in Northern Jordan, and in the Arab world. If the conditions will be changed, and there will be new developments, we will discuss with them the new situation. In any case, we are not willing, for the time being, to take any positive decision to use the IDF forces, in the air or on the ground, against the Syrian forces in Jordan.’⁶⁵

Following Rabin's recommendations (which were arrived in Israel in the morning of the 22nd) there was a discussion of the small group of decision makers, which had formulated the questions to the Americans the day before. At 21:00 on 22 September, a top secret message had been sent to Rabin:

Following our consultations, here is the Israeli position, which you are asking to deliver to the Americans:

1. Your answers, in a form of 'oral paper', have been presented to the Israeli Government, which sees them as an obligation and as an American formal request from us.
2. We are ready in principle to perform a military operation against the Syrian forces in Jordan. Our intention is to perform an air strike against the Syrian forces in Jordan, but if the situation dictates, we will also perform a ground operation. For your information: our aim is that our aerial operation will be successful and overwhelming, therefore in a case that our operation will not lead to withdrawal of the Syrian forces, we will have to move to the next stage – a ground operation.
3. In both cases, our operation will be aimed against the Syrian forces in Jordan. We are not ready to attack Syrian targets in Syria.⁶⁶
4. Essential condition is a meeting with a King's official representative for coordination of the operation. This meeting should be taking place before the operation and as soon as possible.
5. It would be desirable, but it is not a condition, if the Americans would send to Israel a high level representative, may be Haig, for clarification of the details regarding the military operation and its implications.
6. We need more clarifications from the Americans on top of their answers (from yesterday):
 - A. Regarding the prevention of the Soviet intervention, as it appeared in your number 3 answer, we are asking your permission to our interpretation as follows [This paragraph was written in English]:

 With reference to the answer to question three, we wish to observe that we understand the term 'Soviet intervention' as covering Soviet military action and measures undertaken in any of the fronts, including the Suez Canal front, and the sea. Furthermore, we understand that the US decision to prevent Soviet intervention would not be restricted to the time of the operations taken by us with reference to Jordan-Syrian situation. Bearing in mind the possibility that Soviet reaction may be a delayed action.
 - B. [Back to Hebrew] Regarding equipment, this operation could cause the renewal of the fighting in the Canal area, and in this case we will ask you to comply with specific equipment requirements.

7. It is our intention to send a message to the King, through the Americans, and invite him, or his representative, to a meeting (according to paragraph four in this message.) But, we will do that only after we will receive the positive American response to our current message. In the meeting with the King, or his representative, we will try to find out the information and details needed to deal with the Iraqi issue.
8. The Israeli Government did not make an operational decision yet. Our tendency is to agree to an action against the Syrian forces in Jordan that will start with an aerial operation with an option for a ground operation, if it will be needed, on condition of coordination with the King, which is required for the success of the action.

For your information only (Rabin's), the message continued, in the meeting with the King, or his representative, we will clarify the conditions for ending our operation and for ending the presence of our forces in Jordan.' ⁶⁷

THE END OF THE CRISIS

Before the American had the chance to respond to these Israeli questions and comments, starting at the night of 22 September, the Syrians began to withdraw across the border. The withdrawal of the Syrians enabled the Jordanian army to mount an all-out offensive against the Palestinian organizations and to drive them out of their major strongholds.⁶⁸ The Syrian move made the Israeli intervention unnecessary. The Israeli perception was that the crisis is over and the tension has been subsided. The King's throne has been saved.

Two days after the Syrian withdrawal, Sisco met with Rabin to summarize the events of the previous week. Rabin used the opportunity to connect between Israel's readiness to assist the Americans in the Jordanian crisis to the issue of Israel's requests for military equipment, which the administration put on hold. In another top secret message from Washington the embassy sent to Jerusalem the details of this meeting.

Sisco started by reading from a paper saying that this is the official response to us on the Jordan matter. He read as follows: According to the latest available information the forces which invaded Jordan have withdrawn to Syria. We believe that the steps Israel took have contributed remarkably to this withdrawal. We appreciate the positive response to our approach...Sisco added that he shared our assessment that the King purported himself very well and the importance of what Israel did in the situation. This was a further demonstration of our friendly relations.

Rabin said:

I would like to give my personal view that if we look around the world, the US fights many wars for other people's sakes with its own forces, with its own money etc. In the last week the US turned to Israel that she will fight a war which is not exactly our war – to save King Hussein's regime. This aim does not correspond

exactly with our political aims. . . . We might find that the compromise between the King and the guerrillas will be to fight Israel and the King hopes that we shall finish the guerrillas. Regardless of our political goals, we gave the US a positive answer in principle. Israel is a country that has no formal commitment from the US and has no formal alliance with the US. We took risks of confronting the Russians on the Suez Canal and on the Syrian side. Yet we have to argue for years in order to get a couple of aircraft that we fully pay for. When does the US realize that selling arms to Israel is not in contradiction with US interests? There is some bitterness in Israel on this score. We have to argue long for 'screws' but when the chips are down, to whom does the US turn? . . . Why do we have to argue so long on 'small things' when such 'big things' are at stake?

The message continues with Sisco's response, referring to Rabin's mentioning of 'small things,' and remarked, 'you won that round.' At that point Rabin emphasized that 'as a continuation of the conversation between the Prime Minister and the President. . . we have decided to submit our basic requirements [for military equipment] on accordance with the American fiscal years. . . All the US has approved so far was prior to the entrance of the cease-fire into effect and the subsequent Egyptian violations of the standstill.'

Sisco promised that there will be a discussion, on coming Monday, between the administration and Israel on the Israeli requirements.⁶⁹

When analyzing the influence of the Israeli policy during the crisis on the relations with the US, Yitzhak Rabin wrote that 'These events had a far-reaching impact on US-Israeli relations. Israel's willingness to co-operate closely with the United States in protecting American interests in the region altered her image in the eyes of many officials in Washington. We were considered as a partner – not equal to the United States, but nevertheless a valuable ally in a vital region during times of crisis.'⁷⁰

Indeed, the September 1970 crisis, identified by Ben-Zvi as well as many previous observers as a 'watershed' in the American-Israeli alliance. 'Not only did the September crisis,' writes Ben-Zvi, 'quickly become a major prism, or screen, through which Israel's role as a strategic asset to the US came to be assessed and appreciated during the period immediately following the tumultuous events of "Black September" but it also helped to further consolidate and strengthen the partnership between Amman and Jerusalem, which is now become a fully operational alliance.'⁷¹

President Nixon gave expression to his recognition of the new level of the strategic American-Israeli partnership by asking Kissinger to convey a message to Golda Meir, two days after the Syrian withdrawal. 'The president will never forget Israel's role in preventing the deterioration in Jordan and in blocking the attempt to overturn the regime there. He said that the US is fortunate in having an ally like Israel in the Middle East. These events will be taken into account in all future developments.'

'This was probably the most far-reaching statement ever made by a president of the US,' concludes Rabin in his memoirs, 'on the mutuality of the alliance between the two countries.'⁷²

One of the results of the new American approach toward Israel, was the impressive increase in the US aid to Israel. In fiscal years 1971–73 following the crisis, military credits to Israel increased by a multiple of almost 10, reaching the \$300 m to \$500 m level. Military aid during the October 1973 war increased exponentially again to \$2.2bn.⁷³

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52. Rabin (note 33) pp.146–7.
53. ISA 7529/7 from 20 September 1970, 23:30 *New York Time* (in Hebrew). On Hussein's urgent message see also a CNN's report from November 2007 on new declassified documents released by Richard Nixon's library. Online at <<http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/11/...!?iref=topnews>> (accessed 15 Jan. 2008).
54. Kissinger (note 23) pp.622–5.
55. Ibid. p.626. Referring to these questions, Quandt wrote: 'Israel asked for clarification of the United States position on seven points. This was given orally. Both sides relied on these oral undertakings in planning their subsequent moves.' William Quandt, *Decade of Decisions* p.117, footnote 21. Shlaim mentions that the Israeli 'cabinet sought reassurance and submitted a list of eight questions about American policy in the event of escalation,' but points out only two of them. Avi Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan* (London: Allen Lane 2007) p.331. Garfinkle writes that 'But what were these seven clarifications? William Quandt does not tell us nor does any other scholar.' Garfinkle (note 24) p.129.
56. ISA (note 47) (in Hebrew).
57. Abraham Ben-Zvi, *The Origins of the American–Israeli Alliance: The Jordanian Factor* (London and New York: Routledge 2007) p.77.
58. Shlaim (note 55) p.333.
59. ISA 7529/7 from 21 September 1970, 17:45 Washington time (in English).
60. Shlaim (note 55) p.332.

61. ISA (note 59). The two messages on the two meeting of Rabin with Sisco (one at noon and one at the afternoon) were sent at the same time from the embassy in Washington to Jerusalem.
62. ISA 7529/7 from 21 September 1970, 18:00 Washington time (in Hebrew and English).
63. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, 'Crisis Management by Military Cooperation with a Small Ally: American–Israeli Cooperation in the Syrian–Jordanian Crisis, September 1970,' *Cooperation and Conflict* 17/2 (1982) pp.151–62.
64. ISA 7529/7 from 21 September 1970, 23:00 Washington time (in English).
65. ISA 7529/7 from 21 September 1970, 23:45 Washington time (in Hebrew).
66. On this point, a common mistake was made by several scholars who wrote on this crisis was that, as Garfinkle argues, 'Israel did review the possibility of undertaking ground action in Syria,' Garfinkle (note 24) pp.117–38.
67. ISA 7529/7 from 22 September 1970, 21:00 Jerusalem time, 14:00 Washington time (in Hebrew and English).
68. Moshe Shai, 'The Syrians withdrew from Jordan,' *Haaretz* 24 September 1970; Kissinger (note 23) p.630; Shlaim (note 54) p.334.
69. ISA 7529/7 from 23 September 1970 (in Hebrew).
70. Rabin (note 33) p.148.
71. Ben-Zvi (note 57) p.79.
72. Rabin (note 33) p.148.
73. Kathleen Christison, 'Bound by a Frame of Reference, Part II: US Policy and the Palestinians 1948–88,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27/3 (Spring 1998) pp.20–34.

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