

The United States, the Israeli Nuclear Program, and Nonproliferation, 1961-1969

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When he was running for president in 2016, Donald Trump suggested that it might not be such a bad thing if certain American allies acquired nuclear weapons. “At some point,” he said, “we have to say, you know what, we’re better off if Japan protects itself against this maniac in North Korea, we’re better off, frankly, if South Korea is going to start to protect itself.” That meant, of course, that those countries required the same capability that the “maniac” in Pyongyang possessed, but the future president was by no means appalled by that prospect. “Now, wouldn’t you rather in a certain sense,” he asked, “have Japan have nuclear weapons when North Korea has nuclear weapons?”¹

Those remarks, it is fair to say, did not go unnoticed. Many observers, in fact, found it abhorrent that a presidential candidate could take that position, and one of their key claims was that Trump had broken radically with the policy that the United States has pursued since the coming of the nuclear age. One prominent expert, for example, characterized Trump’s comments as “nuclear insanity,” and condemned the candidate for throwing “away 70 years of bipartisan national-security consensus.” “Every president since Harry Truman,” he added, “has tried to stop other nations from going nuclear—no exceptions.”² Another analyst, in a piece titled “Trump’s Nuclear Views Are Terrifying,” claimed that it had been U.S. policy since 1945 “to oppose any new countries from developing nuclear weapons, be they friend or foe.”³ “Since the dawn of the nuclear age,” two other scholars wrote, “the United States has pursued nonproliferation as a top policy priority.”⁴ “The US, since 1945,” another averred, “has been extraordinarily consistent in trying to prevent other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons.”⁵ “Trump’s radical position of

¹ Quoted in Mark Thompson, “Trump Wants to Free the Nuclear Genie,” *Time*, 30 March 2016.

² Joe Cirincione, “Trump’s Nuclear Insanity,” *Politico Magazine*, 30 March 2016.

³ Mira Rapp-Hooper, “Trump’s Nuclear Views Are Terrifying,” *USA Today*, 29 March 2016.

⁴ Gene Gerzhoy and Nicholas L. Miller, “Donald Trump Thinks More Countries Should Have Nuclear Weapons—Here’s What the Research Says,” *Washington Post Monkey Cage*, 6 April 2016.

⁵ Quoted in Zack Beauchamp, “Trump’s Comments on Japanese Nukes Are Worrisome—Even by Trump’s Standards,” *Vox*, 31 March 2016. Another scholar quoted in this article characterized Trump’s remarks this way:

letting the nuclear genie out of the bottle,” nuclear expert Bruce Blair agreed, “also seems clearly at odds with the entire history of U.S. nonproliferation efforts vis-à-vis allies in Asia and Europe.”⁶

In these and in many other cases, that historical claim played a key role in supporting the basic argument about what U.S. policy should be, and about why the alternative policy Trump seemed to be proposing was simply unacceptable: if *every* American administration since 1945 had made limiting the spread of nuclear weapons a top priority, that could only be because the need for nonproliferation was so obvious.

To be sure, some important recent scholarship has emphasized the centrality of this objective in American statecraft. One leading scholar in a major article elevates nonproliferation to “a third pillar of American grand strategy,” in what amounts to “a bold reinterpretation of U.S. foreign policy.”⁷ Preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, he writes, has been “a core, long-standing, and driving goal of U.S. grand strategy,” one that Washington has pursued “since the start of the nuclear age, pursued across presidential administrations despite important changes in the international system.”⁸ Because nuclear weapons have power-equalizing effects that offset U.S. military superiority, another analyst similarly argues in a frequently cited book, Washington has always opposed the spread of nuclear weapons, even to close allies.⁹ The United States, two political scientists argue in an important article published in one of the field’s leading journals,

“This is basically like, ‘Hey, maybe we should think about communism. With one blasé comment, this entire foundation of US grand strategy is just blasted away.’”

⁶ Bruce Blair, “What Exactly Would It Mean to Have Trump’s Finger on the Nuclear Button?” *Politico Magazine*, 11 June 2016.

⁷ Hal Brands, *H-Diplo/ISSF Review Forum* 68, 6 February 2017, 5; Leopoldo Nuti, *H-Diplo/ISSF Review Forum* 68, 6 February 2017, 10.

⁸ Francis J. Gavin, “Strategies of Inhibition: U.S. Grand Strategy, the Nuclear Revolution, and Nonproliferation,” *International Security* 40, no. 1 (Summer 2015): 10, 19. For the claim that every U.S. administration since World War II has pursued this objective, see also Ariel Levite, “Never Say Never Again: Nuclear Reversal Revisited,” *International Security* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2002-2003): 82.

⁹ Matthew Kroenig, *Exporting the Bomb: Technology Transfer and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010). See also Matthew Kroenig, “Force or Friendship? Explaining Great Power Nonproliferation Policy,” *Security Studies* 23, no. 1 (January/March 2014): 1-32.

has tried to prevent even friendly states “from acquiring nuclear weapons despite geopolitical constraints,” a claim which, as one historian notes, suggests “that non-proliferation was always and consistently a central priority of U.S. foreign policy.”¹⁰

Although this work makes a key contribution to the literature on American nonproliferation policy, it overlooks some very important exceptions. It turns out that the claim that the United States has been deeply committed to what has come to be called “nonproliferation” since 1945 is simply not true. President Dwight Eisenhower’s policy in Europe is the best case in point. Eisenhower, historians have shown, very much wanted to arm the NATO allies with nuclear weapons and, indeed, with weapons that they themselves would control. It was, he said at one point, as though “we had been fighting wars with bows and arrows and then acquired pistols. Then we refused to give pistols to the people who were allies even though the common enemy already had them.” Even Germany would receive help in developing a nuclear capability. That country, the president said, “had been his enemy in the past, but on the principle of having only one enemy at a time, only the USSR was now his enemy.”¹¹ And by the end of his term in office, many NATO allies had effective—albeit informal—control of American nuclear weapons. The United States, Eisenhower pointed out, was “willing to give, to all intents and purposes, control of the weapons. We retain titular possession only.”¹²

¹⁰ Or Rabinowitz and Nicholas L. Miller, “Keeping the Bombs in the Basement: U.S. Nonproliferation Policy toward Israel, South Africa, and Pakistan,” *International Security* 40, no. 1 (Summer 2015): 47; Nuti, H-Diplo/ISSF Article Review, 14. For a similar assessment of the recent literature, see Thomas P. Cavanna, “Geopolitics over Proliferation: The Origins of US Grand Strategy and Their Implications for the Spread of Nuclear Weapons in South Asia,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 4 (2018): 577.

¹¹ Quoted in Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 197, 210.

¹² Quoted in Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 188-189. Eisenhower would have liked to go even further and develop a more open nuclear relationship with France. He failed, but only for reasons having to do with disagreements with Paris over basic political issues. See Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 229.

Likewise, President John Kennedy sought to work out a nuclear relationship with France. Even at a time when Washington's relations with Paris had deteriorated badly, the Kennedy administration, one high-ranking official later recalled, was willing to provide the French with "nuclear warheads for their bombs," provided the two countries could reach an understanding on fundamental political issues.¹³ Indeed, after meeting with Kennedy in December 1962, the French ambassador emerged "like a 'cock-of-the-walk,'" for "he could smell warheads at the end of the road."¹⁴

For reasons beyond Kennedy's control this effort ultimately failed, but President Richard Nixon's administration picked up where Kennedy had left off. The relatively low priority Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, assigned to nonproliferation was evident from how they approached the question of nuclear cooperation with America's European allies. Former French President Charles de Gaulle, Kissinger told France's ambassador at one point, "was basically right." It was, he said, "too dangerous to have one country as the repository of nuclear weapons. We would like France to be a possessor."¹⁵ Indeed, Nixon and Kissinger's thinking on this whole issue was rooted in the belief that it was better to have strong allies than weak ones. "We want a strong Europe," Kissinger told de Gaulle's successor, Georges Pompidou, in April 1973. It was for this reason, he said, that his government had "always supported the European nuclear effort."¹⁶ Because it was impossible to know how American policy would evolve in the future, he told a senior British official around that same time, "it was

¹³ Quoted in Francis J. Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 39.

¹⁴ Richard Neustadt, "Skybolt and Nassau: American Policy-Making and Anglo-American Relations," November 1963, National Security Files (NSF), Staff Memoranda: Neustadt, box 322, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts (JFKL), 103.

¹⁵ Quoted in Marc Trachtenberg, "The French Factor in U.S. Foreign Policy during the Nixon-Pompidou Period, 1969-1974," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 8. This effort, like Kennedy's, collapsed, but only because Paris and Washington were again unable to work together in the political arena.

¹⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 29.

surely no bad thing... that the Soviet Government, if they wished to become the dominant Power in the world, should realise that it might not be enough to neutralize only one nuclear rival.”¹⁷

Europe was hardly unique in this respect. Nixon and Kissinger, of course, did not oppose China’s remaining a nuclear power. To the contrary, they believed that a strong China would serve as a useful counterweight to the Soviet Union. It was precisely that sort of thinking that accounted for their decision to oppose the idea of a Soviet strike against Beijing’s nuclear facilities—a “counter-proliferation” option if there ever was one—whereas Kennedy had earlier been very interested in pursuing such a course.¹⁸ Driven by the same logic, the Nixon administration informed Japanese officials in 1969 that it would “understand” if Tokyo wanted to get the bomb.¹⁹

As for the American attitude toward nuclear proliferation in South Asia, competing political priorities repeatedly took precedence over nonproliferation concerns. As Thomas Cavanna writes, with respect to India and Pakistan: “American officials consistently downplayed nonproliferation.... Washington almost always chose to contain the Soviets and to seize lucrative financial opportunities, even when these choices cut against the logic of inhibition.”²⁰ “I do not mind if India makes nuclear weapons,” Kissinger remarked in June 1974. “Why,” he asked, “should India not make them if she has the capability, when we and other nuclear powers make them?”²¹ The same was true with Pakistan. Even President Jimmy Carter, who, in the words of

¹⁷ Memorandum (Memo) from British Cabinet Secretary Burke Trend to Prime Minister Edward Heath, “Discussion with Dr. Kissinger,” 24 April 1973, Kissinger Transcripts Collection (KT) 00707, Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), 3.

¹⁸ Shane J. Maddock, *Nuclear Apartheid: The Quest for American Atomic Supremacy from World War II to the Present* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 287; William Burr, “Sino-American Relations, 1969: The Sino-Soviet Border War and Steps Towards Rapprochement,” *Cold War History* 1, no. 3 (April 2001): 73-112; William Burr and Jeffrey Richelson, “Whether to ‘Strangle the Baby in the Cradle’: The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960-64,” *International Security* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2000-2001): 54-99.

¹⁹ Quoted in Maddock, *Nuclear Apartheid*, 287.

²⁰ Cavanna, “Geopolitics over Proliferation,” 597.

²¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 586.

one scholar, “propelled [nonproliferation] to the forefront of American foreign policy,” refused to pressure Islamabad once its help was required in fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan after Moscow’s invasion of that country.²² On the very day that U.S.S.R. forces entered Afghanistan, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote to Carter that “a review of our policy toward Pakistan” was in order. Specifically, the United States would need to provide Islamabad with more guarantees and arms, which required the administration to recognize “that our security policy toward Pakistan cannot be dictated by our nonproliferation policy.”²³ And if anything, President Ronald Reagan chose to pursue this strategy even more vigorously.²⁴

It is important, however, not to take this argument too far. The United States, of course, has tried to prevent a number of countries at various points in time, including some key allies, from acquiring nuclear weapons.²⁵ The very fact that the United States pursued that aim in some cases but not in others, however, suggests that the American commitment to nonproliferation has not been as deep as many analysts tend to believe. Basic political factors, it is clear, have played a key role in shaping policy in this area.

In this article, I highlight this key point through an analysis of the U.S. attitude toward Israel’s nuclear program from 1961 to 1969. Why does this case warrant special attention? In great part, the answer has to do with the fact that countries like France and China were major

²² J. Michael Martinez, “The Carter Administration and the Evolution of American Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy, 1977-1981,” *Journal of Policy History* 14, no. 3 (July 2002): 279. For the claim that U.S. nonproliferation policy grew much stronger during this period, see also Nicholas L. Miller, “The Secret Success of Nonproliferation Sanctions,” *International Organization* 68, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 913-944.

²³ Quoted in Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 51.

²⁴ Rabia Akhtar, “The Correct Narrative on Pressler,” *Dawn*, 29 May 2017.

²⁵ For examples, see Glenn Chafetz, “The Political Psychology of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime,” *Journal of Politics* 57, no. 3 (August 1995): 743-775; Rebecca K.C. Hersman and Robert Peters, “Nuclear U-Turns: Learning from South Korean and Taiwanese Rollback,” *Nonproliferation Review* 13, no. 3 (November 2006): 539-553; Andrew J. Coe and Jane Vaynman, “Collusion and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime,” *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 4 (October 2015): 983-997; Gene Gerzhoy, “Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint: How the United States Thwarted West Germany’s Nuclear Ambitions,” *International Security* 39, no. 4 (Spring 2015): 91-129; Nicholas L. Miller, “Nuclear Dominoes: A Self-Defeating Prophecy?” *Security Studies* 23, no. 1 (January/March 2014): 52-68.

powers, and it was in a sense natural that they should aspire to become nuclear-armed states. But the same cannot be said for Israel. As Kissinger wrote after leaving office, “Israel is dependent on the United States as no other country is on a friendly power.”²⁶ Washington, therefore, presumably had the ability to prevent Israel from going nuclear if it really wanted to do so. Moreover, many scholars argue that it was during the 1960s that U.S. officials began pursuing a robust nonproliferation policy. According to Francis Gavin, a “dramatic shift” occurred at this time, which “elevated the importance of inhibition in U.S. grand strategy and convinced American policymakers to pay a high price to achieve it.”²⁷ The Israeli nuclear program is thus a good test of how important nonproliferation was to U.S. strategists. And this case is particularly worth studying because so many scholars have taken it for granted that the United States was deeply opposed to Israel’s nuclear program and that it made tremendous efforts to keep the country non-nuclear.²⁸

But the real issue here is not whether the United States was as serious about nonproliferation as many writers have claimed. The very fact that Israel was allowed to develop a nuclear capability without losing U.S. support in the process—and, in fact, it was during this period that U.S. support for Israel grew considerably—shows that there were limits to how seriously the goal of nonproliferation was pursued. The real questions, therefore, are *why* the United States chose to pursue the policy it did and *how much* the goal of nonproliferation

²⁶ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), 483.

²⁷ Gavin, “Strategies of Inhibition,” 38.

²⁸ For example, see Kroenig, *Exporting the Bomb*, 87; Rabinowitz and Miller, “Keeping the Bombs in the Basement,” 50-51; Francis J. Gavin, “Politics, History and the Ivory Tower-Policy Gap in the Nuclear Proliferation Debate,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35, no. 4 (2012): 588. Many other writers have made the same argument, including a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. See Seymour Hersh, *The Samson Option: Israel’s Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1991). Note also Joseph Cirincione’s comments on this issue, as quoted in Max Fisher, “Why is the U.S. Okay with Israel Having Nuclear Weapons but Not Iran?” *Washington Post*, 2 December 2013.

affected U.S. thinking on this issue. What sorts of considerations, foreign and domestic, came into play when policy in this area was being developed?

The ultimate question, thus, is theoretical in nature, and has a direct bearing on the very basic issue of the nature of international politics in the nuclear age. Does it still work essentially the same way as it did in the pre-nuclear period, with traditional political considerations playing the key role in shaping policy? Or did American strategists come to believe that proliferation would be such a disaster that avoiding it would have to have a very high priority? And if it in practice was not assigned that priority, was this because the political leadership thought it might not be such a bad thing if Israel became a nuclear power, or only because some other factor, perhaps having to do with domestic politics, meant that U.S. officials were unable to pursue a policy that was so obviously necessary? The answers, of course, have major implications for how scholars should think about the whole problem of nuclear proliferation.

No Guarantee: Kennedy and Dimona

It is often assumed that Kennedy was deeply opposed to Israel's nuclear program from the very outset of his administration. In the view of Avner Cohen and William Burr, two highly respected and very accomplished historians who have examined the issue in great depth, the president was determined from the start "to prevent an Israeli nuclear weapons program," an objective he considered "central to his efforts to avoid nuclear proliferation."²⁹ The president, they argue, therefore "insisted that Israel permit periodic inspections [of Israel's nuclear reactor at Dimona] to mitigate the danger" and made clear "that meeting the request... was a condition for

²⁹ Avner Cohen and William Burr, "How the Israelis Hoodwinked JFK on Going Nuclear," *Foreign Policy*, 26 April 2016, 6. For other examples of this argument, see Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6, 188; Kroenig, "Force or Friendship?" 27-28; Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 93, 100, 104-105, 114, 117; Patrick Tyler, *A World of Trouble: The White House and the Middle East—from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 105; Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16.

normalizing U.S.-Israeli relations.” Kennedy, they claim, had in a sense “turned the question into a *de facto* ultimatum to Israel.” And the nuclear issue, they suggest, was the main point of an important meeting held in New York between Kennedy and Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in late May 1961.³⁰

Scholars who take this view, however, cannot explain why, if he was so concerned about Israel’s nuclear program, Kennedy did virtually nothing to address it until the spring of 1963. As Cohen has written elsewhere, following the president’s meeting with Ben-Gurion, the administration allowed “the issue to recede into the background for almost two years.”³¹ Why, if Kennedy was so deeply opposed to what the Israelis were doing at Dimona, did the White House nevertheless do so little about it for the first two and a half years he was in office?

Cohen and Burr’s answer, it seems, was that the Israelis were, in effect, able to “hoodwink” the Americans, as the title of their article implies. Despite U.S. efforts to divine Jerusalem’s true intentions, they suggest, the Israelis were able to “pull the wool over Washington’s eyes on the real purpose of the Dimona reactor,” which explains why the Kennedy administration took such a moderate line initially.³² Other scholars have reached essentially the same conclusion.³³

But what is to be made of that argument? Because Cohen and Burr are both exceptional historians and have made a major effort to support what they have written with primary source evidence, it is important to examine their specific claims in some detail.³⁴

³⁰ Avner Cohen and William Burr, “Kennedy, Dimona, and the Nuclear Proliferation Problem: 1961-1962,” 21 April 2016, in National Security Archive (NSA) Electronic Briefing Book (EBB) No. 547.

³¹ Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 111.

³² Cohen and Burr, “How the Israelis Hoodwinked JFK,” 1.

³³ Kroenig, *Exporting the Bomb*, 78.

³⁴ Not everyone who has studied this issue has been as thorough. One scholar, for instance, claims that “one of [Kennedy’s] first official acts as president” was to threaten Ben-Gurion that he would “sever the US-Israeli relationships in order to keep Israel from the bomb.” The document he cites in support of that claim, however, is

It turns out that what is most striking about the evidence that Cohen and Burr present is that it does not lend much credence to the idea that the Kennedy administration was taking a hard line with the Israelis in 1961. To be sure, the Americans were expressing some concern about Dimona and exerting a certain degree of pressure on Jerusalem to schedule an inspection of the reactor, but none of these entreaties constituted an ultimatum. The most forceful statement any U.S. official made during this period came on February 13, when Secretary of State Dean Rusk told Israeli officials that their “complete candor in [the nuclear] field would be of great importance to the future relationships of the two governments.”³⁵ One can scarcely conclude on the basis of Rusk’s remark, however, that the United States was taking an especially forceful line on the issue of Dimona.

More importantly, what took place during the meeting between Kennedy and Ben-Gurion seems to indicate precisely the opposite. As Cohen writes in his book, although Ben-Gurion had been anxious prior to his discussion with the president, the meeting proved “anticlimactic.” The two leaders, he observes, talked in a “relaxed and amicable tone.”³⁶

According to Cohen and Burr, there was little reason for Kennedy to take a stronger line because he felt confident that the United States had reliable information that Israel’s nuclear intentions were peaceful. U.S. inspectors, they write, had visited Dimona just ten days earlier and provided him with “a reassuring report.”³⁷ The clear implication of their argument is that the Israelis had succeeded in concealing their nuclear activities from the administration.

dated May 18, 1963, nearly two and a half years after Kennedy’s inauguration. See Kroenig, “Force or Friendship?” 28.

³⁵ Memorandum of Conversation (Memcon), “Subject: Inspection of Israel’s New Atomic Reactor,” 13 February 1961, NSA EBB No. 547, Document 2D.

³⁶ Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 108.

³⁷ Cohen and Burr, “How the Israelis Hoodwinked JFK,” 2.

There are two major reasons, however, to doubt this interpretation. First, Ben-Gurion had been quite open about Israel's nuclear program during his meeting with Kennedy. Contrary to the claim advanced by some scholars that the two leaders' discussion reveals the extent of the administration's opposition to Israel's pursuit of a nuclear capability, what stands out most clearly from the minutes of their conversation is that the prime minister refused to forswear his country's nuclear option.³⁸ The prime minister had said that he could only promise that Israel's nuclear program was intended for peaceful purposes "*for the time being.*" Israel, Ben-Gurion had added, could "not know what will happen in the future; in three or four years we might have need for a plant to process plutonium."³⁹ As Cohen and Burr admit, "Ben-Gurion was giving himself a lot of wiggle room."⁴⁰ Indeed, as Zaki Shalom writes, the prime minister's admissions "spelled a flagrant deviation from Israel's official declarations on the aims of the Dimona Project."⁴¹ Thus, an analysis of this meeting hardly supports the widespread view that the Kennedy administration was deeply opposed to Israel's nuclear program, and that, consequently, the only way the Israelis could succeed in acquiring a nuclear capability was by deceiving the United States.⁴²

³⁸ "In his brief time in office," Or Rabinowitz and Nicholas Miller write, "Kennedy opposed the Israeli weapons program and sought to bring it under U.S. control." In support of that claim, they point to the president's meeting with Ben-Gurion, and in particular to his warning "that Egypt would follow suit if Israel developed a nuclear weapons capability." See Rabinowitz and Miller, "Keeping the Bombs in the Basement," 51.

³⁹ Memcon, "Subject: Conversation between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Ben Gurion," 30 May 1961, in United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1961-1963*, Vol. 17: *Near East, 1961-1962* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1994), 134-135 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Cohen and Burr, "How the Israelis Hoodwinked JFK," 3.

⁴¹ Zaki Shalom, *Israel's Nuclear Option: Behind the Scenes Diplomacy between Dimona and Washington* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 27. For similar assessments of this meeting, see Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 200-202; Michael Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement: How Israel Went Nuclear and What That Means for the World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 193-194.

⁴² Cohen and Burr argue that Assistant Secretary of State Philips Talbot's notes of the meeting suggest that Ben-Gurion had succeeded in misleading Kennedy by mumbling and rapidly speaking in a low voice. See Cohen and Burr, "How the Israelis Hoodwinked JFK," 3. But if anything, Talbot's notes make it even clearer that Ben-Gurion had been very open about Israel's nuclear aspirations. See Memcon, 30 May 1961, NSA EBB No. 547, Document 9B.

Second, although it is true that the May 1961 Dimona inspection amounted essentially to a sham, there is little to indicate that U.S. officials bought the Israeli line. Cohen and Burr, for their part, provide no evidence to support that conclusion. In fact, the evidence they present suggests precisely the opposite—that the Americans deliberately went along with what they knew was a charade because they were principally interested in keeping up the *appearance* that Israel was not engaged in nuclear weapons activity.

Indeed, Kennedy must have known both that the report he had received from the inspectors was more or less worthless and that the Israelis were pursuing a nuclear capability. Aside from the fact that the visit, as is widely recognized, had been tightly controlled by the Israelis, the mission given to the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) scientists who had visited Dimona, as Cohen points out in his book, had been “not to challenge what they were told, but to verify it.” In all likelihood, he observes, they had not been made privy to U.S. intelligence on Israel’s nuclear program and, in effect, had merely “toured the construction site as official guests escorted by their Israeli hosts.”⁴³ The fact that key intelligence had not been shared with the scientists was especially significant, given that less than a month before their visit the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had reported there was reason to believe the Israelis were building a subterranean plutonium reprocessing plant, indicating “that chemical separation of the irradiated fuel is to take place in Israel.”⁴⁴ Even so, as Cohen himself writes in his book, the team of inspectors “recognized both its own technical limitations and the fact that the reactor was providing Israel with a future nuclear-weapons option.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 107. Other writers assess the May 1961 “inspection” similarly. For examples, see Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 198-200; Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 98.

⁴⁴ CIA Bulletin, “Franco-Israeli Nuclear Collaboration,” 27 April 1961, folder: Israel Subjects, Ben-Gurion Visit, the Arab-Israeli Situation (6 April 1961), box 119A, NSF, Countries, JFKL.

⁴⁵ Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 190. For additional evidence that casts doubt on the idea that the Americans were reassured by the May 1961 inspection, see Shalom, *Israel’s Nuclear Option*, 33-34; Unsigned Handwritten Note, undated, folder: Israel, General (March-May 1961), box 118, NSF, Countries, JFKL. Note also that just days prior to

More importantly, it is quite clear that American intelligence analysts had not been deceived and were well aware that the Israelis were pursuing a nuclear capability. “At a minimum,” an October 1961 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) reported, “we believe [Israel] has decided to develop its nuclear facilities in such a way as to put it into a position to develop nuclear weapons promptly should it decide to do so.”⁴⁶ As Cohen and Burr recognize, “This NIE left no doubt that the AEC scientists’ impressions from their visit to Dimona had no impact on the way in which the intelligence community made its own determination on Dimona’s overall purpose.”⁴⁷

In short, the argument that the Israelis “hoodwinked” the Kennedy administration is difficult to sustain. How, then, can the absence of any real effort on the part of the White House to put pressure on Jerusalem to drop its nuclear program prior to mid-1963 be understood? Is it

the AEC scientists’ visit to Dimona, Mordechai Gazit, a minister at the Israeli embassy in Washington, all but admitted to an American counterpart that Israel’s objective was to acquire a nuclear capability. “Israel,” he said, “naturally looked to whatever means it could find for protecting itself.” This statement, Cohen and Burr recognize, amounted to an “implicit admission.” See Memcon, “Subject: Israeli Atomic Energy Program,” 16 May 1961, NSA EBB No. 547, Document 6; Cohen and Burr, “Kennedy, Dimona and the Nuclear Proliferation Problem.”

⁴⁶ NIE 35-61, “The Outlook for Israel,” 5 October 1961, NSA EBB No. 547, Document 11A. See also NIE 4-3-61, “Nuclear Weapons and Delivery Capabilities of Free World Countries Other Than the US and UK,” 21 September 1961, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vols. 7-9, microfilm supplement, Document 243, 7-8.

⁴⁷ Cohen and Burr, “Kennedy, Dimona, and the Nuclear Proliferation Problem.” AEC scientists visited Dimona again in September 1962 for a visit that also amounted to a charade. U.S. intelligence analysts noted afterward that “certain basic intelligence requirements” had not been met and that “the reactor might give Israel a nuclear weapons capability.” See Memo from Director of the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Rodger Davies to Talbot, “Subject: Second Inspection of Israel’s Dimona Reactor,” 27 December 1962, NSA EBB No. 547, Document 16C. It is hardly surprising, then, that a May 1963 Special NIE (SNIE) concluded that “the Israelis, unless deterred by outside pressure, will attempt to produce a [nuclear] weapon sometime in the next several years,” with 1966 identified as the most likely date. See SNIE 30-2-63, “The Advanced Weapons Programs of the UAR [United Arab Republic] and Israel,” 8 May 1963, folder: Israel, 1963 (2 of 2), box 55, Myer Feldman Papers, JFKL. Even so, some scholars claim that U.S. intelligence officials underestimated how quickly Israel could acquire a nuclear capability because they believed Dimona was only a 26-megawatt (MW) reactor, when in reality its power was at least 40 MW. For this claim, see Alexander H. Montgomery and Adam Mount, “Misestimation: Explaining US Failures to Predict Nuclear Weapons Programs,” *Intelligence and National Security* 29, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 376; Nicholas L. Miller, “Why Nuclear Energy Programs Rarely Lead to Proliferation,” *International Security* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 49. The relevant question, however, is whether U.S. intelligence estimated correctly the date at which Israel would be capable of acquiring a nuclear capability. In this respect, American assessments turned out to be extremely accurate. For a helpful analysis of U.S. intelligence on Israel’s nuclear program, see Austin G. Long and Joshua R. Shiffrin, “How Long until Midnight? Intelligence-Policy Relations and the United States Response to the Israeli Nuclear Program, 1959-1985,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* (forthcoming).

possible Kennedy thought that in principle it would not be such a bad thing, given certain political realities, if Israel got the bomb?

The president, as many experts recognize, could have attempted to keep Israel non-nuclear by offering the country a robust American security guarantee against Soviet or Arab attack. In fact, whether the United States would be willing to provide Israel with formal, public, and credible assurances was the central issue relating to the latter's nuclear program.⁴⁸

Some scholars question whether, even if Washington had offered Jerusalem a security guarantee, the latter would have surrendered its nuclear option, but there is reason to believe that such a bargain might have been accepted.⁴⁹ Such an assurance from the United States had, after all, been one of Ben-Gurion's foremost foreign policy priorities since the early 1950s, and the prime minister had regularly made the point that Israel could not afford to give up its nuclear program without getting something in return from the Americans.⁵⁰ His successor, Levi Eshkol, was even more forthright on the matter. "[T]he question of whether or not nuclear weapons appear in the [Middle East]," he candidly told a British representative in July 1963, "depends on the Great Powers and their willingness to provide Israel with the security assurance it seeks."⁵¹ The prime minister's basic approach to the matter was to tell Kennedy, "If you want it, there will be no [nuclear weapons]. [But] give us something else which will deter [the Arabs]." Indeed, his

⁴⁸ For a useful discussion of this point, see Alexandre Debs and Nuno P. Monteiro, *Nuclear Politics: The Strategic Causes of Proliferation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 219-238.

⁴⁹ One scholar writes that it is an "open question" whether Israel would have accepted such a tradeoff. See Yair Evron, *Israel's Nuclear Dilemma* (London: Routledge, 1994), 150.

⁵⁰ Zach Levey, "Israel's Quest for a Security Guarantee from the United States, 1954-1956," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 22, no. 1/2 (1995): 43-63; Abraham Ben-Zvi, *Decade of Transition: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Origins of the American-Israeli Alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 32, 36-37, 44, 50, 67-68, 70-71.

⁵¹ Memcon, "Subject: Israel Nuclear Program; Security Guarantee," 14 August 1963, folder: Israel, General (September 1963), box 119A, NSF, Countries, JFKL.

position seems to have been quite clear: “[W]e have Dimona.... If you are opposed to that, what can you promise? If you can [give a security guarantee] please [tell us] how and why.”⁵²

In any case, it was the Kennedy administration’s assumption by the spring of 1963, when the White House did finally turn its attention to the nuclear question, that to keep Israel non-nuclear the United States would need to grant it such an assurance. Washington’s “hole card with Israel,” National Security Council (NSC) staffer Robert Komer explained, was Jerusalem’s “desire for a US security guarantee; if possible we should tie this not only to Jordan but to Israeli agreement not to develop nuclear weapons.”⁵³ Kennedy, Assistant Secretary of State Philips Talbot wrote on May 20, felt “it important to give serious consideration to Israel’s strong desire for a more specific security guarantee.” It was the president’s belief, he added, that “only through allaying Israel [*sic*] fears about the long-range threat to its existence that leverage to forestall possible Israel [*sic*] preventive warfare and to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons can be maintained.”⁵⁴

Kennedy, however, was deeply reluctant to make such a bargain, fearing it would undercut Washington’s ability to maintain a balanced policy between the Arabs and Israelis. “Each matter arising in our relationship with Israel,” the State Department stressed, “is carefully weighed in terms of its effect on our policy of impartiality as between Israel and the Arabs and of its effect on Israel’s security.” If the United States were to align itself more closely with Israel it “[w]ould constitute a direct challenge to the Arabs by the US” and “destroy growing Arab confidence in our impartiality.” Probably of even greater concern to Kennedy, an alliance of this type would “render the US responsible in Arab eyes for every Israeli military venture” and

⁵² Quoted in Guy Laron, *The Six-Day War: The Breaking of the Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 198, 204.

⁵³ Memo for the Record, “Meeting with the President on Situation in Jordan,” 27 April 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18: *Near East, 1962-1963* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1995), 485.

⁵⁴ Letter from Talbot to Ambassador John Badeau, 20 May 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18, 545.

“encourage the more fanatical Arabs to seek a similar relationship with the Soviet Union.” In short, “To undertake, in effect, a military alliance with Israel would destroy the delicate balance we seek to maintain in our Near Eastern relations.”⁵⁵

In addition, a security guarantee would create a moral hazard problem. Jerusalem, administration officials felt, would grow “obstreperous in its Arab policy, confident that our guarantee would protect it from any adverse consequences of its actions.” As a result, there was no way to undertake such a step “*without automatically binding ourselves to [the] Israeli position on armistice lines, water, refugees, Jordan, etc., unless we negotiated all these issues out in advance.*”⁵⁶

In the end, the White House accepted this logic. The objections raised by the State and Defense Departments to a security guarantee, Komer wrote Kennedy on September 26, were “persuasive.” An enhanced commitment to Israel would not only be of dubious efficacy, it also “would force [the Arabs] to react publicly and seek Soviet arms and reassurances.”⁵⁷ Thus, on October 2 Kennedy rejected Eshkol’s request for a security guarantee because doing so would cause an “adverse effect” in the Arab world, one that “would be magnified if, as is all too likely, the Arabs responded by seeking compensatory reassurances from the USSR.”⁵⁸

Alternatively, Kennedy could have opted to apply brutal pressure on the Israelis to force them to give up their nuclear program. That sort of approach, however, would have required the administration to confront a friendly country, one with which the United States shared an intimate bond. As Kennedy told Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir at one point, Washington

⁵⁵ Memo from Talbot to Rusk with Attachment, “Subject: Israel and United States Policy,” 7 June 1962, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 17, 712, 715-716.

⁵⁶ Memo from Komer to Kennedy, 23 July 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18, 651 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁷ Memo from Komer to Kennedy, 26 September 1963, folder: Israel, General (September 1963), box 119A, NSF, Countries, JFKL.

⁵⁸ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, 2 October 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18, 721-722.

had “a special relationship with Israel in the Middle East really comparable only to that which it has with Britain over a wide range of world affairs.”⁵⁹

Consequently, taking a tough line with the Israelis would have raised profound political and moral questions. U.S. decision-makers, after all, fundamentally conceded the logic of the Israeli position. If the United States, they reasoned, was not going to try to alleviate Israel’s concerns about its security—concerns which the White House viewed as entirely legitimate, particularly given the legacy of the Holocaust—it was only natural that Ben-Gurion and Eshkol would seek an independent deterrent. As National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy later wrote, there was simply no way to avoid the central question of “whether the United States would wish to accept the moral and political responsibility of forcing the abandonment of the Israeli nuclear weapons program, even assuming that it could. If that abandonment should take place, and if at some time in the future only a nuclear threat or even a nuclear response could prevent Israel from being overrun, would the United States do for the Israelis what it had made them unable to do for themselves?”⁶⁰ Even some strategists who tended to oppose Israel’s nuclearization conceded that they “could understand how if we were in Israel’s situation we would decide that we should develop nuclear weapons.”⁶¹ Thus, as Shalom notes in his insightful study of this issue, there is evidence that American officials found ways of communicating to Jerusalem that they considered Israel’s nuclear program to be justifiable in moral terms, given the country’s security concerns.⁶²

⁵⁹ Memcon, “Subject: Conversation with Israel Foreign Minister Meir,” 27 December 1962, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18, 280. Confronting Israel also would have had significant domestic political consequences for Kennedy.

⁶⁰ McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices about the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988), 512. At least one AEC scientist who visited Dimona took a similar view. See Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 112-113.

⁶¹ Memcon, 16 May 1961, NSA EBB No. 547, Document 6.

⁶² Shalom, *Israel’s Nuclear Option*, 67. Some American elected officials may have gone a good deal further in their talks with Israeli representatives. “Don’t be a bunch of fools,” Senator Stuart Symington, who served on the Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees, reportedly told Ben-Gurion’s aide, Shimon Peres, at one point during

In the spring of 1963, however, Kennedy took a much tougher line on the nuclear issue, a shift that Shalom characterizes as a “dramatic volte-face.”⁶³ The president, as is now widely known, began putting tremendous pressure on the Israeli government over the issue of Dimona. The American commitment to Israel, he threateningly wrote Ben-Gurion on May 18, “would be seriously jeopardized in the public opinion in this country and in the West, if it should be thought that this Government was unable to obtain reliable information on a subject as vital to peace as the question of Israel’s efforts in the nuclear field.”⁶⁴

The confrontation, however, proved extremely short-lived. By August, Kennedy had decided to return to a “low profile” on the issue of Dimona.⁶⁵ The point is important, for it raises serious doubts about the commonly held view that the president was now taking the matter very seriously and that U.S. policy only softened because his successor, Lyndon Johnson, took less interest in the nuclear question.⁶⁶ How can the shift in American policy—indeed, the two shifts—be explained?

The answer, it seems, has to do with Kennedy’s concerns over how Israel’s nuclear program would impact what he considered vital U.S. interests as they related to European great power politics and China’s nuclear program.⁶⁷ It was at precisely this time that the twin issues of West Germany’s potential nuclearization and Beijing’s possible acquisition of the bomb were

Kennedy’s presidency. “Don’t stop making atomic bombs.” Symington, who later sponsored an important piece of legislation designed to strengthen U.S. nonproliferation policy, evidently took this position because he felt that Israel’s need for a nuclear capability was entirely understandable in light of its security concerns. When asked about how his law would affect the Israelis’ nuclear arsenal, he replied: “Oh, they need it. I’ve been telling [Moshe] Dayan for thirty years they have to have the bomb.” Quoted in Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 119, 262.

⁶³ Shalom, *Israel’s Nuclear Option*, 33.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 128.

⁶⁵ Shalom, *Israel’s Nuclear Option*, 58-68.

⁶⁶ For example, see Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 234, 237, 251.

⁶⁷ This argument was first put forward in Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 385 n. 134; Trachtenberg’s Appendix Eight, “Kennedy and the Israeli Nuclear Program,”

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/appendices/appendixVIII.html>. For this argument, see also Avshalom Rubin, *The Limits of the Land: How the Struggle for the West Bank Shaped the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 59.

coming to a head. The former problem was intimately connected to the question of a political settlement between the United States and the Soviet Union, for it represented the central political dispute in Cold War Europe.⁶⁸ The latter was likewise a matter of tremendous concern to Kennedy, for he regarded a Chinese nuclear test “as likely to be historically the most significant and worst event of the 1960s.”⁶⁹ The president, it seems, worried that the negotiations with Moscow over these problems, which ultimately culminated in the adoption of the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT)—the main vehicle the superpowers used to deal with these issues—would be endangered unless something were done to address, at least at a superficial level, Israel’s nuclear program.

The evidence relating to this point is striking. The matter of an arms limitation agreement for the Middle East, Kennedy’s special emissary, John McCloy, informed Egypt’s president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, on June 27, was becoming more urgent, in part due to “conditions such as the likelihood of a Chinese nuclear explosion.”⁷⁰ “Certainly,” Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara argued at one point, “nothing would hold the Germans back... if proliferation proceeded elsewhere.”⁷¹ If the United States failed to stop even small countries like Israel from going nuclear, a July 1962 NIE predicted, the West Germans would grow indignant at their “second-class position” and ultimately conclude “that they must seek to acquire nuclear capabilities of their own.”⁷² The Israelis needed to understand, the American ambassador in

⁶⁸ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*; James McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943-1954* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Brendan Rittenhouse Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty: U.S. Cold War Grand Strategies and the Liberal Tradition,” *International Security* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 9-43.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Burr and Richelson, “Whether to ‘Strangle the Baby in the Cradle,’” 60-61.

⁷⁰ Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, 28 June 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18, 611.

⁷¹ Minutes of Briefing by Secretary McNamara on Issues Related to Proliferation, 7 January 1965, Document CK3100467809, Declassified Documents Reference System.

⁷² Quoted in Hal Brands, “Non-Proliferation and the Dynamics of the Middle Cold War: The Superpowers, the MLF, and the NPT,” *Cold War History* 7, no. 3 (August 2007): 392. On this point, see also Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 388-389 n. 18; Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*, 80, 96.

Israel, Walworth Barbour, informed Eshkol, that Dimona was important to Kennedy for, as Cohen puts it, “global reasons, whose significance went beyond any bilateral issues,” and the administration’s pressure, therefore, should not be taken “as indicating a fundamental change in the special relationship between the United States and Israel.”⁷³ Or as Kennedy himself put it to Ben-Gurion: “[T]he problem is much larger than its impact on the Middle East. Development of a nuclear weapons capability by Israel would almost certainly lead other larger countries, that have so far refrained from such development, to feel that they must follow suit.”⁷⁴

This general interpretation is supported by the fact that U.S. pressure subsided after July, even though the Israelis had not succumbed to it. Eshkol, instead, refused in an August 19 letter to accede categorically to Kennedy’s request that the United States be permitted to conduct semiannual inspections at Dimona.⁷⁵ True, Israel agreed to sign the LTBT, but as Barbour immediately commented, its signature was more or less meaningless. “The Government,” he reported, “rapidly ascertained that it had nothing to lose by signing and, a bit later, that it could gain nothing by delaying its declaration of intent.”⁷⁶

More importantly, it was abundantly clear to administration officials that, in light of Kennedy’s refusal to offer Israel a security guarantee, the Eshkol government had no intention of relinquishing its nuclear option.⁷⁷ The administration’s decision, Eshkol commented, left him

⁷³ Avner Cohen, “Israel and the Evolution of U.S. Nonproliferation Policy: The Critical Decade, 1958-1968,” *Nonproliferation Review* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 8. See also Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement*, 233-234.

⁷⁴ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, 18 May 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18, 544. See also Memo by the Working Group on Near East Arms Limitation, “Subject: Arms Limitation and Control Arrangement for the Near East,” undated, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18, 563.

⁷⁵ Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, 19 August 1963, folder: Israel, General (1-19 August 1963), box 119A, NSF, Countries, JFKL.

⁷⁶ Airgram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, “Subject: Israel Decides with Deliberate Speed to Join Test Ban Agreement,” 5 August 1963, folder: Israel, Nuclear Energy Program (1963), box 427, NSF, Robert Komer Files, JFKL. The Israelis were obviously aware that they could develop a nuclear capability without having to test their arsenal. Thus, the LTBT created no real barrier to their nuclear progress. On this point, see Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement*, 234.

⁷⁷ Even writers who believe Kennedy was deeply opposed to Israel’s nuclearization acknowledge that Eshkol’s response had not fully fulfilled the president’s requests. For example, see Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 189, 232-234.

“with nothing to say to assure [the] Israeli people and [the] question of [a] credible deterrent to Nasser is still unsolved.”⁷⁸ It was hardly surprising, then, that many Israelis felt it “would be short-sighted for Israel not to move toward [a] position where it could exercise [its nuclear] option quickly if later circumstances required.” Jerusalem, the White House recognized, “did not consider abandonment of [that] option to be [an] irrevocable decision.”⁷⁹ To the contrary, Eshkol’s aide, Zvi Dinstein, later recalled that the Americans had even been informed via informal channels “that Israel was able [to attain a nuclear capability], and that it therefore wasn’t interested in inspection, because it was an existential matter.”⁸⁰ In fact, in July Eshkol had even gone “so far as to probe how the United States would view possible advanced consultations in the event Israel found developments in the Middle East made it necessary for her to embark on a nuclear weapons program.”⁸¹ Thus, Komer viewed a November 4 message from Eshkol to Kennedy as simply the commencement of another bargaining round over whether the administration would be willing to offer Israel security assurances in exchange for nuclear self-denial.⁸²

Nevertheless, almost as soon as the Americans and Soviets had concluded the LTBT negotiations and the West German and Chinese nuclear questions had become less sensitive, Kennedy removed the pressure. Despite its obvious shortcomings, the president replied that Eshkol’s August 19 letter had been “most welcome,” and the tension that had afflicted U.S.-

⁷⁸ Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, 4 October 1963, folder: Israel, General (1-23 October 1963), box 119A, NSF, Countries, JFKL. See also Memcon, “Subject: United States Security Assurance for Israel,” 11 September 1963, folder: Israel, General (September 1963), box 119A, NSF, Countries, JFKL; Memo for the Record, 14 November 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18, 779-786.

⁷⁹ Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, “Subject: Inspections of Dimona Reactor,” 30 August 1963, folder: Israel, General (28-31 August 1963), box 119A, NSF, Countries, JFKL.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement*, 239.

⁸¹ Memo from Department of State Executive Secretary Benjamin Read to Bundy, “Subject: Israel’s Assurances Concerning Uses of Atomic Energy,” 19 March 1964, folder 3, box 138 [2 of 2], NSF, Country File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas (LBJL).

⁸² Memo from Komer to Kennedy, 5 November 1963, folder: Israel, General (1-6 November 1963), box 119A, NSF, Countries, JFKL. See also Memo from Read to Bundy, “Subject: Letter from Israeli Prime Minister,” 9 November 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18, 774.

Israeli relations since the spring quickly subsided.⁸³ What this suggests is that the White House was far more concerned about *appearances* than it was about actually trying to prevent Israel's nuclearization. To avoid damaging American efforts on the West German and Chinese nuclear questions, Kennedy evidently felt that the Israelis simply had to be subtler about how they ran their nuclear program and to at least appear to be practicing nuclear restraint. So long as Jerusalem kept a low profile to ensure that U.S. and Soviet attempts to deal with these larger countries were not put in jeopardy, the United States would not protest Israel's continued nuclear development.⁸⁴

Thus, Kennedy's policy on the Israeli nuclear program can only be understood when placed in its proper geopolitical context, a point that is of fundamental importance. In a sense, it is perhaps not all that surprising that such power political concerns shaped the way American strategists dealt with this issue. That U.S. decision-makers approached the nuclear question with an eye to core geopolitical considerations is to be expected, particularly by analysts who view international politics through a realist lens. What is odd, however, is that practically every scholar who has written on the subject has ignored or downplayed this aspect of the story.

"Intense Pressure"? Johnson and Israel's Acquisition of the Bomb

"[T]he Johnson administration," two excellent scholars, Or Rabinowitz and Nicholas Miller, claim, "ultimately exerted intense pressure on Israel over its nuclear program, even threatening abandonment on several occasions."⁸⁵ A number of other prominent analysts take a similar view. "From the very start of his administration," the reputable diplomatic historian, Douglas Little,

⁸³ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, 26 August 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18, 691.

⁸⁴ This construal of the evidence is also supported by the fact that high-ranking U.S. strategists had considered the "sharing of weapons information" with Israel as an inducement to persuade it to sign a test ban agreement. See Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 385 n. 134.

⁸⁵ Rabinowitz and Miller, "Keeping the Bombs in the Basement," 53.

writes in a frequently cited article, “Johnson, like Kennedy, placed a high priority on preventing nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.”⁸⁶

A number of other scholars, however, take precisely the opposite view. In the final analysis, Cohen concludes, Johnson was “unwilling to risk an American-Israeli crisis over the issue.”⁸⁷ The president, Shalom agrees, “shunned a tough policy toward Israel on the Dimona Project” and treated “the Dimona issue with kid gloves.”⁸⁸

Which side has the stronger argument? The answer, of course, hinges on the historical evidence. So what does that evidence suggest?

It is not difficult to find evidence that supports the view held by scholars like Rabinowitz and Miller. There were certain U.S. officials—in particular Rusk, Komer, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Warnke, and Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford—who advocated taking a tough line on the Israeli nuclear question. Indeed, it is possible to make a strong case that the United States was pursuing a forceful policy during this period, but only if one ignores the role of the president. Johnson’s views were, however, decisive, and the key point that emerges from close study of this issue is that he was not, in the final analysis, willing to support the sort of approach that his subordinates favored. This basic point becomes clear when one examines a number of key episodes in this story.

⁸⁶ Douglas Little, “The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 4 (November 1993): 575. For a similar argument, see Kroenig, *Exporting the Bomb*, 79.

⁸⁷ Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 193.

⁸⁸ Shalom, *Israel’s Nuclear Option*, 81, 96. For other examples of this view, see Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 190, 238, 251-253; Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement*, 242-258; Ben-Zvi, *Decade of Transition*, 128; Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, 510; John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 35-36; Dennis Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2015), 69; Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 337; Richard B. Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 103.

To support their claim about Johnson's "intense pressure," Rabinowitz and Miller allude to the president's June 1964 meeting with Eshkol. At that meeting, they emphasize, Johnson called "on Israel to place the nuclear facilities at Dimona under safeguards and [warned] that 'the U.S. is violently against nuclear proliferation.'"⁸⁹ "Washington's staunch nonproliferation stance," Matthew Kroenig agrees, "was perhaps expressed most forcefully by President Johnson [at this meeting]."⁹⁰

What these scholars fail to note, however, is that the president had directed that the Israelis be assured privately that they were, in effect, free to ignore this remark. In part because it was an American election year, Shalom observes, Johnson wanted "a congenial, supportive atmosphere during Eshkol's visit." The nuclear issue, he notes, "was definitely not at the top of the administration's priorities," and the president, consequently, raised it "almost incidentally." Even Johnson's warning about being "violently" against nuclear proliferation, he points out, lacked "any trace of a threat."⁹¹

Indeed, the Israelis were well aware that the administration had no intention of pressing the issue. Johnson, Undersecretary of State W. Averell Harriman informed Israel's Deputy Defense Minister, Shimon Peres, hoped that Eshkol would support the president in the 1964 election. And so long as Johnson remained in office, Harriman said, the United States would not press Israel on its nuclear program: "You have nothing to worry about during this period.... We have several years ahead of us to work together."⁹² The president, it seems, had only used tough language during his formal meeting with Eshkol to appease his subordinates and thereby

⁸⁹ Rabinowitz and Miller, "Keeping the Bombs in the Basement," 53.

⁹⁰ Kroenig, *Exporting the Bomb*, 87. For this view, see also Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 134-135.

⁹¹ Shalom, *Israel's Nuclear Option*, 85, 92, 94. For the minutes of the meeting, see Memcon, "Subject: Johnson/Eshkol Exchange of Views," 1 June 1964, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 18: *Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1964-1967* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2000), 152-159.

⁹² Quoted in Shalom, *Israel's Nuclear Option*, 93.

neutralize them.⁹³ As Guy Laron points out, the administration “was talking to Israel out of both sides of its mouth—one side issuing harsh utterances, the other more sympathetic.”⁹⁴

This dynamic was also evident during the series of key negotiations that took place in February-March 1965, when Harriman and Komer visited Israel to work out an agreement on the nuclear question. Although Komer, who, again, favored taking a hard line on the issue, attempted repeatedly to force the Israelis to place Dimona under international safeguards, Eshkol simply refused to budge. The prime minister, Shalom points out, likely felt no need to compromise because he was secure in the knowledge that Johnson was unwilling to have a confrontation with Israel on the matter. Thus, the result was that the Israelis made no concessions with respect to their nuclear program, other than reiterating their commitment to not be the first country to “introduce” nuclear weapons into the Middle East. As Harold Saunders of the NSC staff later summarized the outcome, the Americans ultimately “gave up” on trying to get more robust assurances.⁹⁵ “The White House,” Shalom concludes, “had in effect affirmed Israel’s right to continue the buildup of the Dimona Project.”⁹⁶

Johnson, then, was totally willing to undercut his subordinates. There is perhaps no better example of this dynamic than when the president, on the very same day in February 1966 that Rusk spoke harshly to Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban, reassured the latter that he “saw

⁹³ On this point, see the useful discussion in *Ibid.*, 85-87, 95-96, 123-125. See also Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement*, 248-249, 257, 341.

⁹⁴ Laron, *The Six-Day War*, 192.

⁹⁵ Memo from Saunders to National Security Adviser Walt Rostow, 21 October 1968, folder: Israel Arms, 1 October 1968-20 January 1969 [1 of 2], box 18, NSF, Harold Saunders Files, LBJL.

⁹⁶ Shalom, *Israel’s Nuclear Option*, 117. See also Laron, *The Six-Day War*, 199. Rabinowitz and Miller acknowledge that the Israelis “found this wording appealing because it allowed them to continue with their nuclear program.” See Rabinowitz and Miller, “Keeping the Bombs in the Basement,” 53.

nothing that was going to disturb our relations.”⁹⁷ “Rusk and the State Department,” Shalom writes, “must have considered these pledges a slap in the face.”⁹⁸

As for the issue of U.S. inspections of Dimona, the evidence does not support Kroenig’s assertion that they “were designed to verify that Israel was not engaged in sensitive nuclear activity.”⁹⁹ In fact, it demonstrates exactly the reverse, that the inspections were designed to *avoid* verifying what the Israelis were doing, while maintaining the pretense that Washington was serious about the issue. The point is important—quite aside from the question of whether the Americans correctly understood Israel’s nuclear ambitions—because it shows that Johnson had no desire to bring matters to a head with Jerusalem.

Johnson administration officials, it is clear, understood that Dimona was intended to provide Israel with a nuclear capability. “The Israelis,” the deputy chief of mission at the U.S. embassy in Israel, William Dale, later said, “told us this was a peaceful plant. We did not believe it.”¹⁰⁰

In fact, contrary to the belief held by some scholars that the Eshkol government was “notoriously evasive” with the Americans about its nuclear intentions, the evidence suggests

⁹⁷ Memo for the Record, “Subject: President’s Talk with Israeli Foreign Minister Eban,” 9 February 1966, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, 548 (emphasis added).

⁹⁸ Shalom, *Israel’s Nuclear Option*, 130.

⁹⁹ Kroenig, “Force or Friendship?” 21. Many scholars believe Israel effectively concealed its nuclear progress during the Johnson presidency. For example, see Maddock, *Nuclear Apartheid*, 233. Jeffrey Richelson’s tentative conclusion that “Israel had developed a nuclear weapon under the noses and feet of U.S. inspectors and spies—both literally and figuratively” is especially significant, given two other scholars’ characterization of his book as the “canonical work” on American nuclear intelligence. See Jeffrey T. Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb: American Nuclear Intelligence from Nazi Germany to Iran and North Korea* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 262; Montgomery and Mount, “Misestimation,” 359.

¹⁰⁰ William Dale, recorded interview by Henry E. Mattox, 19 September 1988, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, 15. Dale also stated that the embassy believed Israel had stolen weapons-grade uranium in 1965 from the Nuclear Materials and Equipment Corporation in Pennsylvania, an incident known as the “Apollo Affair.” For the story, see Victor Gilinsky and Roger J. Mattson, “Did Israel Steal Bomb-Grade Uranium from the United States?” *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 17 April 2014; Scott C. Johnson, “What Lies Beneath,” *Foreign Policy*, 23 March 2015.

quite the opposite.¹⁰¹ As early as May 1963, when Komer asked Mordechai Gazit, an Israeli embassy official, whether Israel was conducting a public relations campaign “to justify Israeli development of nuclear weapons,” the latter had simply grinned.¹⁰² Similarly, in response to Komer’s observation during a February 1964 meeting that it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that “Israel was systematically... putting itself in a position where it could quickly develop an independent nuclear deterrent,” Gazit “did not contest this point at all.” Given its strategic environment, he had instead replied, “Israel had an even greater need than France for a deterrent.” “I am,” Komer could only conclude, “all the more convinced... that Israel is definitely going down the nuclear road.”¹⁰³ A group of Israeli military officers went even further. When asked in March 1965 whether the missile force Israel was developing could really be effective if it were equipped with only conventional weapons, they responded: “Don’t worry, when we need the right kind of warhead, we will have it... and after that there will be no more trouble in this part of the world.”¹⁰⁴

But the White House was determined to make sure that Israel’s intent to develop nuclear weapons could not be verified, which is why U.S. intelligence officials were instructed not to share what they knew about Israel’s nuclear program with the AEC scientists who carried out the inspections. The CIA station chief in Israel at the time, John Hadden, later recalled that his office knew everything that was going on at Dimona, including plutonium reprocessing, but he and his colleagues had not been allowed to brief the inspectors.¹⁰⁵ This procedure was followed, CIA

¹⁰¹ David Rodman, “Phantom Fracas: The 1968 American Sale of F-4 Aircraft to Israel,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (November 2004): 137.

¹⁰² Memo for the Record, 14 May 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 18, 538.

¹⁰³ Memo for Record, “Luncheon with Israeli Minister Gazit, 12 February 1964,” 13 February 1964, folder 3, box 138 [2 of 2], NSF, Country File, LBJL. See also Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 134.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Little, “The Making of a Special Relationship,” 576.

¹⁰⁵ Cohen and Burr, “Kennedy, Dimona and the Nuclear Proliferation Problem,” n. 3.

Director Richard Helms later admitted, because, as Cohen puts it: “The dominant urge at the time was to contain any firm American acknowledgement of an Israeli nuclear capability.”¹⁰⁶ One American nuclear physicist even remembered that after he had received an invitation to visit Dimona in 1967, Barbour had strongly discouraged him from going. “Oh no,” the ambassador had said. “If you learn anything about Dimona, I’d have to tell the president, and then he would have to do something, and he doesn’t want to.”¹⁰⁷ Even though “[a]ll indications [were] toward [an] Israeli acquisition of a nuclear capability,” one U.S. report candidly noted, the administration’s lack of interest in the inspections had “led the Israelis to believe we are not serious.”¹⁰⁸ The Dimona visits, one scientist who visited the reactor during this period later admitted, were part of a “game.” Their purpose, he said, was to find “ways to *not* reach the point of taking action.”¹⁰⁹ “[T]he inspections,” Laron thus concludes, “were a charade—and the inspectors knew it.”¹¹⁰

But the real test with respect to how seriously Johnson took the nuclear question came in 1968, when the president faced an important decision over whether to link the sale of American F-4 Phantom aircraft—which Jerusalem wanted very badly—to Israel’s agreement to sign the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).¹¹¹ Some scholars claim that the president took a very hard line that year. Little, for instance, writes that Johnson told Eshkol when they met in January that the

¹⁰⁶ Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 394 n. 43.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Victor Gilinsky, “Casting a Blind Eye: Kissinger and Nixon Finesse Israel’s Bomb,” in *Moving beyond Pretense: Nuclear Power and Nonproliferation*, ed. Henry Sokolski (Carlisle, PA: United States Army Strategic Studies Institute Press, 2014), 339 n. 13. On another occasion, Barbour reportedly refused to accept what he was told about the Israeli nuclear program at an intelligence briefing. “If I acknowledge this,” he explained, “then I have to go to the President. And if he admitted it, he’d have to do something about it.” Quoted in Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 170.

¹⁰⁸ Memo from Davies to Talbot, “Subject: Observations of H. Earle Russell During His Recent Trip to Israel Based on Conversations with Embassy Officers,” 5 March 1965, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, 382.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 112 (emphasis added).

¹¹⁰ Laron, *The Six-Day War*, 199.

¹¹¹ It is worth noting that Johnson had earlier resisted his subordinates’ efforts to get him to make U.S. military assistance to Israel conditional on its agreement to halt its nuclear program. In 1964 and 1965, the president had authorized the sale of modernized tanks to Israel, first through West Germany and then directly. In 1966, he went a step further, approving a sale of A-4 Skyhawk aircraft to Jerusalem.

United States could not “support an Israel that sits tight,” and that unless Israel “renewed its pledge not to go nuclear, there would be no Phantoms.”¹¹²

There is no record, however, of Johnson making these threats in any of his meetings with Eshkol.¹¹³ The comment about how Washington could not support “an Israel that sits tight” was not made by Johnson during these discussions, but instead comes from a set of talking points that had been prepared prior to Eshkol’s visit by National Security Adviser Walt Rostow.¹¹⁴ As for the nuclear issue, there is no evidence that Johnson raised the matter at all. “Nuclear weapons, missiles, [and the] NPT,” Saunders recorded, “did not come up.”¹¹⁵

To be sure, certain administration officials favored taking a tougher line and made a major effort to pressure the Israelis on the nuclear issue by threatening to withhold the Phantoms. But those warnings, it is clear, were empty because Johnson refused to back them up. The president, Rusk ultimately was forced to inform Clifford, was “strongly opposed to twisting arms on the nuclear thing in connection with [the] Phantoms. Doesn’t want them linked.”¹¹⁶ The Israelis were well aware that Johnson had no intention of bringing real pressure to bear on them. In fact, he had more or less promised them that he would go through with the Phantom sale during Eshkol’s visit, telling Israeli diplomat Ephraim Evron: “Awh, Eppie, you know I’m going to give you the Phantoms.”¹¹⁷ Likewise, Johnson informed Israel’s ambassador, Yitzhak Rabin, in November that he had instructed Rusk and Clifford to approve the F-4 sale “without any

¹¹² Little, “The Making of a Special Relationship,” 579.

¹¹³ The farthest the president was willing to go was to tell Eshkol that his government needed to “know what kind of Israel we would be expected to assist.” See Memcon, “Subject: U.S.-Israeli Talks,” 8 January 1968, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 20: *Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1967-1968* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2001), 90.

¹¹⁴ Memo from Rostow to Johnson, “Subject: Talking Points for Prime Minister Eshkol,” 5 January 1968, folder: Visit of Prime Minister Eshkol of Israel, 7-8 January 1968 [3 of 3], box 3, NSF, Saunders Files, LBJL.

¹¹⁵ Memo for the Record, “Subject: Decisions from the Eshkol Visit,” 9 January 1968, folder: Visit of Prime Minister Eshkol of Israel, 7-8 January 1968 [1 of 3], box 3, NSF, Saunders Files, LBJL.

¹¹⁶ Memo of Telephone Conversation between Rusk and Clifford, 1 November 1968, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 20, 586.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Steven L. Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America’s Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 160.

conditions,” which explains why Rabin gave no ground during his discussions of the matter with Warnke.¹¹⁸

Johnson, then, was perfectly willing to pursue his own policy, rather than the sort of approach that officials like Rusk favored. It was, indeed, for precisely this reason that he had taken steps to ensure that key information on Israel’s nuclear program was withheld from the nonproliferation hawks in his administration. When Helms informed him in 1968 that he had received credible intelligence that Israel had acquired a nuclear capability, the president ordered that it be kept secret. The information, he instructed, was not to be divulged, even to Rusk or McNamara. As one writer concludes, Johnson “did not want to know what the CIA was trying to tell him, for once he accepted that information, he would have to act on it.”¹¹⁹ But that basic point—that the president repeatedly overruled the nonproliferation hawks—is left out of Rabinowitz and Miller’s discussion of the issue. And in its absence, all of the evidence they present about officials like Rusk leaves one with a very different impression as to what the actual nature of American policy was.

The Johnson administration’s approach, then, can scarcely be characterized as one of “intense pressure.” The actual policy was, in fact, much milder. How is that basic attitude to be understood? The answer, it turns out, is that concerns having nothing to do with nonproliferation played a major role in shaping U.S. policy.

The administration still had the option of trying to keep Israel non-nuclear by offering it a security guarantee.¹²⁰ But like Kennedy, Johnson decided that doing so would not be in

¹¹⁸ Draft Memo for the Record, “Subject: F-4 Negotiations with the Israelis,” 9 November 1968, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 20, 618.

¹¹⁹ Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 189. See also Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 298; Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement*, 293. For additional evidence that top U.S. officials did not want to be informed of key intelligence relating to Israel’s nuclear program, see Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 143-144, 151, 160, 165-166, 168-169.

¹²⁰ Memcon, “Subject: Harriman Mission—The Nuclear Question,” 1 March 1965, folder: Israel Security (Harriman/RWK Mission), February/March 1965 [1 of 4], box 21, NSF, Saunders Files, LBJL.

Washington's interest. Aside from the fact that offering the Eshkol government such assurances would further overextend the United States at a time when it was already tied down in Vietnam, American analysts still believed that taking such a step would cause unacceptable damage to important U.S. interests vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. "Given the strong Arab resentment over US support for Israel in the past," a March 1965 NIE stated, "developments of this sort might lead toward a more pronounced polarization of the Arab-Israeli dispute to include the Soviets and Arabs on one side, and Israel and the West on the other."¹²¹ Keeping Israel non-nuclear, Komer recognized, would simply require the United States to pay "probably unacceptable costs," such as a "full-fledged military alliance."¹²² Consequently, the White House was still in no position to demand that the Eshkol government abjure nuclear weapons. As Barbour put it, taking such an approach would be like "trying [to] buy [a] new Cadillac for ten bucks."¹²³

The June 1967 war only reinforced the administration's thinking in this respect. Johnson, of course, had been faced with a set of excruciating dilemmas during that conflict. The president understood that Israel legitimately felt threatened, but there had been little that he could promise to assuage its concerns. The administration had feared that if the United States intervened, it would wreck its position in the Arab world—thereby polarizing the Middle East along Cold War lines—and potentially spark a region-wide war that could escalate to the superpower level. Moreover, because the United States was already involved militarily in Southeast Asia, Johnson had lacked the necessary support at home for a major U.S. operation in the Middle East. Consequently, the president probably had decided to inform the Israelis through informal channels that he would not protest if they launched a preemptive strike. If the United States was

¹²¹ NIE 30-65, "The Arab-Israeli Problem," 10 March 1965, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, 403.

¹²² Memo from Komer to Bundy, 22 April 1964, folder 3, box 138 [2 of 2], NSF, Country File, LBJL.

¹²³ Message from Komer to Bundy, 6 March 1965, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, 388.

not going to provide for Israel's safety, Johnson had reasoned, how could he insist that it refrain from defending itself?¹²⁴

Given this experience, the administration felt that it could not pressure Israel to relinquish its nuclear option. Johnson, after all, had a deep concern for Israel's security. The president, Saunders observed soon after the war, had "more than a purely political interest in *preserving* Israel's existence. We as a nation feel close to Israel—maybe because of the Biblical heritage; maybe because Israel is an attractive underdog; maybe because it looks like a nation of pioneers; maybe because it's mainly a Western nation like ours.... The President himself feels this way."¹²⁵ In addition, the Israelis enjoyed unique political backing from their American supporters. "The existence of a large, well-organized group of Israel sympathizers within the U.S. body politic," one State Department paper noted, "obviously puts a limit on the degree to which the [United States Government] might contemplate a different policy."¹²⁶ Bluntly threatening to abandon Israel, a policy favored by officials like Rusk, was therefore scarcely a realistic option. Warning of major damage to the special relationship, Komer pointed out at one point, was "not too credible." The administration could not "say too loudly we'll withdraw from [the] Middle East and let chips fall where they may."¹²⁷

The main lesson the administration appeared to draw from the war, in fact, was that the United States might actually benefit to a certain degree if Israel possessed nuclear weapons. To be sure, Israel had already crossed the nuclear threshold on the eve of the conflict when it had assembled two crude nuclear devices, which would have complicated U.S. nonproliferation

¹²⁴ William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 23-52.

¹²⁵ Memo from Saunders to Rostow and Bundy, "Subject: A New US Policy for the Middle East," 3 July 1967, folder: New Basic Policy, 1 April 1966-20 January 1969, box 8, Saunders Files, NSF, LBJL (emphasis in original).

¹²⁶ NEA/IAI, "U.S.-Israel Relations," 8 February 1967, folder 3, box 140, NSF, Country File, LBJL.

¹²⁷ Message from Komer to Bundy, 1 March 1965, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 18, 371.

efforts, as Washington would now have had to roll back, rather than merely forestall, Israel's nuclearization. In addition, because of the policy Johnson had pursued during the crisis, it is questionable whether Jerusalem would still have been willing to give up its nuclear option, even in return for an ironclad American security guarantee.

But it is clear that the administration would not have wanted to make such an offer in any case. "I could well believe," Bundy told Eban on July 5, "that he would have found our position disconcerting, in that we could not give assurances of the breadth and precision which Israel wanted at a critical hour." Nevertheless, he had considered Johnson's decision "absolutely right," even though it had revealed "the limits on the meaning of the executive assurances which have been given to Israel over the years."¹²⁸

What that implied was that the White House did not necessarily believe Israel's acquisition of the bomb would be such a bad thing. The administration, of course, had no desire to revisit the sorts of painful dilemmas it had faced during the May-June 1967 crisis. And a nuclear-armed Israel would presumably reduce the likelihood that the United States would have to intervene in a future conflict to save that country. With that in mind, it is hardly surprising that a number of American officials spoke about Israel's pursuit of a nuclear capability in relatively sympathetic terms. "[I]t may be argued," Barbour wrote soon after the war, "[that the Israelis would] be foolish not to produce extra-conventional weapons against enemies whose total conventional military capabilities conceivably could outstrip Israel's within another decade."¹²⁹ Some high-ranking decision-makers, like McNamara, went even further. "I can understand," he

¹²⁸ Memcon, 5 July 1967, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 19: *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2004), 612-613.

¹²⁹ Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, 27 June 1967, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 19, 569.

later said, “why Israel wanted a nuclear bomb. There is a basic problem there. The existence of Israel has been a question mark in history, and that’s the essential issue.”¹³⁰

In sum, basic political considerations played a major role in shaping the Johnson administration’s policy on the Israeli nuclear question. Certain U.S. officials, it is true, favored giving nonproliferation goals a high priority, but they were repeatedly overruled by a president who did not support them. Johnson, in fact, was determined to avoid a confrontation with Israel over the nuclear issue, and therefore took steps to ensure that Jerusalem’s activities in this area could not be verified. And, particularly after June 1967, the political leadership seems to have drawn the conclusion that if the United States was not going to take major steps to provide for Israel’s security, it could hardly object to its going nuclear. An Israel with nuclear weapons, in fact, would help the Americans avoid being put in the same difficult position they had been in during that crisis. Nonproliferation goals, although they had not counted for nothing, had been distinctly subordinate to other political interests.

Did Nixon Resist Israel’s Nuclearization Because of Nonproliferation Concerns?

Many scholars believe that the Nixon administration, rather than being deeply opposed to Israel’s nuclear program, decided to accept that country’s nuclearization, more or less without protest.

Nixon, Cohen writes, gave his “endorsement of a nuclear-capable Israel” and chose to grant the country “an exemption” from U.S. nonproliferation policy.¹³¹ The White House, he and Burr

¹³⁰ Quoted in Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 109. McNamara may have been even more supportive of Israel going nuclear than these comments suggest. William Quandt, an expert on American Middle East policy who served on the NSC staff in both the Nixon and Carter administrations, has a recollection that the secretary of defense expressed the view that a nuclear Israel would help obviate the need for the United States to come to Israel’s aid in a crisis, a position consistent with his concerns about overextending the American military for the sake of nonproliferation goals. Author Skype Interview with William B. Quandt, 5 February 2016.

¹³¹ Avner Cohen, *The Worst-Kept Secret: Israel’s Bargain with the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 27, 30.

claim, “looked the other way while Israel built the Middle East’s first nukes.”¹³² The administration, Gavin writes, “stopped pressuring Israel to get rid of its nuclear weapons.”¹³³

Rabinowitz and Miller, however, recently challenged that mainstream view in an important article. U.S. nonproliferation efforts, they claim, did not waver “even in the face of geopolitical constraints.” “This basic commitment to nonproliferation,” they write, “was upheld even under Nixon.” With respect to Israel specifically, they argue, “administration officials understood that an Israeli nuclear arsenal would be a serious threat to U.S. security interests in the Middle East.” With this in mind, they suggest that the administration as a whole “was loath to see Israel become a nuclear power.” To be sure, Rabinowitz and Miller acknowledge that the administration agreed to settle for less—accepting Israel’s nuclearization as long as it did not test or advertise its arsenal—but it did so only “because prior harsher policies had failed to prevent Israel from acquiring nuclear weapons.” Far from having given up on nonproliferation, they conclude, Nixon’s policy of “keeping the bomb in the basement” demonstrated that he had continued to pursue that objective.¹³⁴

But did the administration ever actually pursue those “harsher policies”? To be sure, there were still a number of U.S. officials who favored adopting a forceful approach in 1969. But Nixon, like Johnson before him, had no intention of backing that sort of policy and, indeed, was perfectly willing to live with an Israeli bomb, provided Jerusalem did not flaunt its nuclear capability. The president, in fact, was “leery” of linking the Phantoms to the nuclear question and, as Cohen and Burr observe, effectively “torpedoed” the bureaucracy’s idea of using the

¹³² Avner Cohen and William Burr, “Don’t Like that Israel Has the Bomb? Blame Nixon,” *Foreign Policy*, 12 September 2014, 1.

¹³³ Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*, 117. For other examples of this argument, see Gilinsky, “Casting a Blind Eye”; Maddock, *Nuclear Apartheid*, 286, 287; Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement*, 315-319, 342; Rubin, *The Limits of the Land*, 277; Tyler, *A World of Trouble*, 112. Gavin, however, has modified his views about this issue. See Gavin, “Strategies of Inhibition,” 37.

¹³⁴ Rabinowitz and Miller, “Keeping the Bombs in the Basement,” 57, 60, 83.

planes as a form of coercion.¹³⁵ The administration's decision to accept an Israeli "bomb in the basement," then, was reached despite the fact that a tougher policy had never really been tried.

Even still, Rabinowitz and Miller maintain that the administration, while it ultimately accepted Israel's nuclearization, had nevertheless not abandoned nonproliferation as a major objective. During a key meeting in September, they note, Nixon and Meir, the latter of whom had succeeded Eshkol as prime minister, worked out an important deal. In exchange for a U.S. agreement to accept Israel's nuclear capability, Meir pledged that the Israelis would neither test nor advertise their arsenal. According to Rabinowitz and Miller, the administration's policy, as reflected in this bargain, "was largely motivated by nonproliferation concerns."¹³⁶

But does that claim accurately reflect Nixon's thinking on this issue? The president, it is clear, had decided to ignore the recommendations coming from the State Department and the Pentagon in favor of the policy that Kissinger advocated. The national security adviser, for his part, wanted to "avoid direct confrontation with Israel" on the nuclear question.¹³⁷ The new administration, he had told Rabin soon after being named national security adviser, "would be more relaxed on the nuclear issue."¹³⁸ It was pointless, he told two of his aides soon after the start of the administration, to try to stop countries with serious security concerns from acquiring nuclear weapons.¹³⁹ As a matter of practical politics, Kissinger felt that the most the United

¹³⁵ Avner Cohen and William Burr, "Israel Crosses the Threshold," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 62, no. 3 (May/June 2006): 26.

¹³⁶ Rabinowitz and Miller, "Keeping the Bombs in the Basement," 50-51.

¹³⁷ Memcon, "Subject: Review Group Consideration of Response to NSSM-40, June 26, 1969," 30 June 1969, KT00030, DNSA.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 327.

¹³⁹ Cohen, *The Worst-Kept Secret*, 6. It is also worth noting that when Johnson administration officials had asked Nixon, following his election in November 1968, whether he would support Johnson's addressing a special session of Congress for the purpose of persuading friendly countries like Israel to sign the NPT, the president-elect's response had been far from enthusiastic. On this point, see Editorial Note, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. 20, 624. See also National Security Decision Memo 6, "Subject: Presidential Decision to Ratify Non-Proliferation Treaty," 5 February 1969, NSA EBB No. 189, Document 4.

States could hope to accomplish was to get the Israelis to keep their “bomb in the basement.” Having accepted that approach, Nixon proceeded to work out such an arrangement with Meir.

Nixon and Kissinger, then, were thinking along similar lines, and that means that one key document—a lengthy analysis Kissinger wrote for the president when this whole issue was coming to a head within the administration in July—sheds considerable light on the principal factors shaping U.S. policy during this period.¹⁴⁰ The key part of this report, of course, is the rationale Kissinger gave for a “bomb in the basement” policy. And the main reason why it was so important to make sure that the Israelis did not go through with “the significant international act” of publicly declaring their possession of nuclear weapons, he wrote, was that it “might spark Soviet nuclear guarantees to the Arabs, tighten the Soviet hold on the Arabs and increase the danger of US-Soviet nuclear confrontation.” Israel’s nuclearization, Kissinger felt, would be detrimental to American interests for a number of reasons, but in listing his concerns nonproliferation only came fourth. His worries that Israel’s acquisition of nuclear weapons would increase the danger of a superpower confrontation in the Middle East; possibly complicate efforts to reach an Arab-Israeli political settlement; and expose the United States to the charge of complicity in helping Israel go nuclear were all apparently given priority over considerations relating to proliferation.¹⁴¹

In fact, it is fair to say that Nixon and Kissinger saw certain benefits in Israel’s nuclearization. Israel’s acquisition of nuclear weapons, the national security adviser felt, could perhaps help facilitate an Arab-Israeli political settlement. To achieve that objective, Jerusalem would have to surrender a degree of security by withdrawing from territories it had occupied in

¹⁴⁰ The document in question is “Summary of the Situation and Issues,” 19 July 1969, NSA EBB No. 485, Document 10. Kissinger attached it as Tab A to a separate memorandum he sent to Nixon, in which he identified himself as the document’s author. See Memo from Kissinger to Nixon, “Subject: Israeli Nuclear Program,” 19 July 1969, in *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. 23: *Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1969-1972* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2015), 131.

¹⁴¹ “Summary of the Situation and Issues,” 19 July 1969, 3-6.

June 1967 in exchange for intangible promises of peace from the Arabs, a predicament with which both Nixon and Kissinger sympathized. The Israelis, the latter observed, had almost no margin for error because for them “losing one conventional war is as bad as losing a nuclear war.” The Meir government, therefore, did “not want nuclear weapons just against the Arab nations per se, but rather against the possibility of a defeat in conventional war.”¹⁴²

The Israelis, Kissinger thus reasoned, would likely be more willing to countenance a withdrawal if they could have nuclear weapons as compensation. “[A]ny conceivable geographical settlement,” he explained, “would reduce Israel’s security.... It seems axiomatic that a nation of three million people confronted by 100 million with any technological capacity at all would not over an historical period have a chance of surviving.” Consequently, “If the Israelis give up the conventional security which advantageous borders provide, they might want nuclear weapons to offset what they are giving up.” The nuclear and peace questions were, in a real sense, working “in inverse proportion.”¹⁴³

Conversely, an Israeli nuclear capability might lead Jerusalem’s adversaries to exhibit greater restraint. “Perhaps,” a February NIE surmised, “awareness of the possibility of Israel’s early acquisition of nuclear weapons gives the Soviets an added incentive to try to move the Arabs toward a reduction of tensions.”¹⁴⁴ The same logic, U.S. officials recognized, applied to the Arabs. “If the possession of nuclear weapons offered an ultimate deterrent for Israel,” one lengthy report on the subject stated, “we would perhaps be prepared to conclude that, whatever

¹⁴² Memo for the Record, “Subject: NSC Ad Hoc Review Group Meeting, Friday, June 20, 1969, on NSSM 40—Israeli Nuclear Program,” 20 June 1969, in *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. 23, 118.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 118. See also Memo from Kissinger to Nixon, “Subject: The Next Step in the Middle East—NSC Meeting Thursday, September 11,” 10 September 1969, in *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. 23, 159; “Summary of the Situation and Issues,” 19 July 1969, 5.

¹⁴⁴ NIE 11-69, “Basic Factors and Main Tendencies in Current Soviet Policy,” 27 February 1969, in *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. 12: *Soviet Union, January 1969-October 1970* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2006), 81. “Could [the Soviets],” Nixon asked at an April 25 NSC meeting, “be concerned about [an] Israeli nuclear capability?” The minutes of the discussion suggest that there was “[n]o disagreement” from his advisers on this point. See Minutes of an NSC Meeting, 25 April 1969, in *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. 23, 92.

other disadvantages this development might have, its contribution to Israel's security, especially with the prospect of continuing Arab hostility, was in the US interest."¹⁴⁵

Thus, an Israeli nuclear capability would strengthen Jerusalem's ability to protect itself, an important consideration, given the Nixon administration's total aversion to the idea of giving Israel a security guarantee. Any American pledge to defend Israel with nuclear weapons, Nixon believed, could not be made credible. "No President," he said at one point, "could risk New York to save Tel Aviv."¹⁴⁶ "[T]alking about a U.S. commitment to Israel," Kissinger agreed, "was a waste of time."¹⁴⁷ Given their views on this issue and their mutual concern for Israel's security, Nixon and Kissinger must have attached considerable importance to the possibility that Israel's nuclearization would help the Israelis provide for their own defense, which, in turn, would make it easier for the United States to avoid the sorts of painful dilemmas Johnson had faced in June 1967.¹⁴⁸

In short, concerns relating to nonproliferation were a factor in the Nixon administration's thinking on the Israeli nuclear issue, but they were not as important as Rabinowitz and Miller imply. Basic political considerations played a more significant role in shaping the White House's approach. Indeed, Rabinowitz ultimately seems to have come to this same conclusion. Whereas she and Miller downplay geopolitical considerations in their article, she and James Cameron make a very different argument in an article that was published just two years later. In a section given the subtitle "The Primacy of Geopolitics," she and Cameron argue that Nixon was not particularly concerned with preventing proliferation. Nixon and Kissinger, they write, "gave

¹⁴⁵ Memo from State Department Executive Secretary John P. Walsh to Kissinger, Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard Helms, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Earle Wheeler, "Subject: Israeli Nuclear Weapons Program—NSSM 40," 30 May 1969, Basic Study, NSA EBB No. 485, Document 6, 7.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*, 111.

¹⁴⁷ Memo for the Record, "Meeting of the NSC Special Review Group on the Middle East," 28 May 1970, in *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. 23, 397.

¹⁴⁸ Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 325, 427-428 n. 9.

primary emphasis to Cold War geopolitics on regional issues” and at times violated the spirit of the NPT “by turning a blind eye to or actively facilitating activity by [U.S.] regional allies that many of the treaty’s supporters would have vehemently opposed.” In this respect, they write: “The Israeli case is the best-known example.”¹⁴⁹

Conclusion

It is frequently argued that the United States’ fundamental commitment to nonproliferation played a key role in shaping its policy toward Israel’s nuclear program. “From 1961 to 1968,” Rabinowitz and Miller write, “the Kennedy and Johnson administrations made repeated efforts, including threats of abandonment, to convince Israel to sign the NPT and forswear nuclear weapons.” And although those efforts failed, they argue, scholars who believe that the Nixon administration’s willingness to live with an Israeli “bomb in the basement” reveals that the White House was not serious about nonproliferation are mistaken. “In fact,” they claim, “the bargain was largely motivated by nonproliferation concerns: U.S. policymakers determined that keeping the Israeli bomb secret and untested would minimize the risk of reactive proliferation and limit the damage to U.S. credibility on nonproliferation.”¹⁵⁰

But why, if the Americans were so committed to nonproliferation in this case, did they not pursue a more forceful policy? One of the most common answers scholars have given to this question is that Jerusalem succeeded in hiding its efforts to develop a nuclear capability from U.S. inspectors who visited the Dimona reactor. “[T]he Israelis,” Cohen and Burr claim, “were adept at concealing their activities.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ James Cameron and Or Rabinowitz, “Eight Lost Years? Nixon, Ford, Kissinger and the Non-Proliferation Regime, 1969-1977,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, no. 6 (2017): 844-845.

¹⁵⁰ Rabinowitz and Miller, “Keeping the Bombs in the Basement,” 50-51.

¹⁵¹ Cohen and Burr, “Israel Crosses the Threshold,” 24.

That interpretation, however, simply does not stand up in the light of the evidence. The Americans, it is clear, were well aware the Israelis were seeking to acquire a nuclear capability and that the Dimona visits basically amounted to a sham. ““The inspections, quote unquote,”” Barbour said later, amounted to “a window-dressing exercise.” The whole process was, to his mind, “ridiculous.”¹⁵² Indeed, the top political leadership accepted this arrangement as a way of avoiding having to confront Jerusalem over the issue. As a group of AEC officers readily admitted at one point, “[T]he US government is not prepared to support a real ‘inspection’ effort.” U.S. scientists, they noted, had “been cautioned to avoid controversy, ‘be gentlemen’ and not take issue with the obvious will of the hosts. On one occasion it seems that the team was criticized roundly by the Israelis for having ‘acted like inspectors’ and the criticism was passed on rather than refuted.”¹⁵³ And the Israelis had for their part been amazingly open about what they were doing in the nuclear field. In short, the Dimona inspections were a charade, one in which the Americans were complicit.

A second argument which scholars frequently make to explain U.S. policy in this area is that American decision-makers were unable to take a tough line with the Israelis for domestic political reasons.¹⁵⁴ Such considerations were certainly an important factor. For example, it was Kissinger’s view that if Nixon chose to delay the delivery of the Phantoms: “The American body

¹⁵² Walworth Barbour, recorded interview by Sheldon M. Stern, 22 May 1981, JFKL Oral History Program, 2-3.

¹⁵³ Memcon, “Subject: 1969 Dimona Visit,” 13 August 1969, NSA EBB No. 189, Document 16B. Kissinger alluded to this arrangement even more directly. “We do not want to prove to the world that Israel has nuclear weapons,” he wrote, “and we would put ourselves in an even more difficult situation than we are in now if we proved it to ourselves.” See “Summary of the Situation and Issues,” 19 July 1969, 8.

¹⁵⁴ For examples, see Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 98, 108, 151; Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement*, 181, 185, 194, 256-257, 309, 316; Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 35-36; Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 176; Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation*, 134; Kenneth Kolander, “Phantom Peace: Henry ‘Scoop’ Jackson, J. William Fulbright, and Military Sales to Israel,” *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 3 (June 2017): 567-593.

politic would generate intolerable political trouble for the Administration—damaging Congressional attacks on Administration programs.”¹⁵⁵

Domestic political considerations, however, hardly explain the whole story. To be sure, a number of American strategists opposed Israel’s nuclear program, but even many these individuals were less concerned with nonproliferation than they were with the possibility that Israel’s nuclearization would effectively polarize the Middle East along Cold War lines, making the Arabs more dependent on the Soviet Union and poisoning U.S. relations with them. Policymakers like Kissinger who argued for a softer approach were even more attuned to basic strategic considerations, especially the possibility that Israel’s nuclearization might hold certain advantages for the United States. A more secure Israel might be more prepared to accept a peace settlement with the Arabs; an Israeli nuclear capability might lead the Soviets and the Arabs to pursue more moderate policies; and the burden on Washington to come to Israel’s defense in a major crisis would be reduced. Many officials, in other words, accepted Kenneth Waltz’s basic view that nuclear weapons make it relatively easy for a state to defend its core political interests.¹⁵⁶ And many Americans—including, ultimately, people like Warnke, who had wanted to take a hard line on this issue—felt that Israel, particularly given the legacy of the Holocaust and its understandable security concerns, had every right to acquire weapons that could help prevent its destruction.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, even Komer conceded “the theoretical force of De Gaulle’s argument” and acknowledged that “Israel had a much more legitimate case for an absolute deterrent than De Gaulle.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ “Summary of the Situation and Issues,” 19 July 1969, 13.

¹⁵⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz and Scott D. Sagan, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 1-46.

¹⁵⁷ Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement*, 302.

¹⁵⁸ Memo for Record, “Subject: Talk with Israeli Defense Minister Shimon Peres,” undated, folder 4, box 138 [2 of 2], NSF, Country File, LBJL. See also Memo for Record, 21 April 1964, folder 4, box 138 [2 of 2], NSF, Country File, LBJL.

Thus, political considerations shaped American policy on the Israeli nuclear question a great deal more than one might have thought, with concerns about proliferation counting for much less than a number of scholars have claimed. To be sure, that consideration was not simply ignored. Washington did accept certain risks in choosing not to resist Israel's nuclear development more vigorously. And a world filled with many nuclear-armed states might well be a very dangerous place, one in which, moreover, the United States would face greater constraints on its freedom of action.¹⁵⁹ Most of the American political leadership, with that in mind, probably wanted there to be as few nuclear powers as possible and understood that Israel's nuclearization created certain dangers. Those considerations, it is true, were taken into account when policy on this issue was being formulated.

That, however, could never be the whole story. States are self-interested actors with an array of important strategic concerns, and policy in this area is never worked out in a political vacuum. To the contrary, it is precisely because a nuclear capability has such tremendous political significance that basic political interests are bound to come into play in a major way. Even in the nuclear age, such factors shape international politics in ways that are entirely natural, a point that should hardly come as a surprise to scholars of a realist bent. Indeed, the analysis presented in this article can be taken as vindicating the basic realist view of this issue.

The main lesson to take away from this whole story, however, is what it implies for how to think about the whole question of proliferation in the future. Many experts think that, in comparison to nonproliferation, other objectives are relatively unimportant, and, consequently, that it should be pursued vigorously, regardless of political context. But what the Israeli case suggests is that such an approach might be overly inflexible and too isolated from fundamental political realities that are bound to play a major role in shaping policy on this issue.

¹⁵⁹ Marc Trachtenberg, "Waltzing to Armageddon?" *The National Interest* 69 (2002): 144-152.

So what does this analysis imply for the case mentioned at the outset of this article, that of Japan and South Korea? Does the United States not have a certain interest in using the specter of a nuclearized South Korea or a nuclearized Japan to put pressure on China to cooperate on the North Korean nuclear problem? Is that sort of policy not at least worth considering? That course of action, however, would be rejected out of hand by the kind of nonproliferation absolutism that so many experts embrace. And that whole approach to the question, to reiterate, is supported by the view that the United States has always strongly opposed nuclear proliferation in the past. Thus, getting the history right—in other words, understanding that American policy on this issue has been considerably more nuanced and the policy matrix far more complex—might help us think about current policy dilemmas in less rigid, more politically sensitive, and, indeed, more effective ways.