

Myer Feldman Oral History Interview –JFK#10, 12/11/1966
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Feldman, (1914 - 2007); Legislative assistant to Senator John F. Kennedy (1958-1961); Deputy Special Counsel to the President (1961-1964); Counsel to the President (1964-1965), discusses Arab-Israeli border disputes, opposing peace negotiations, and cooperating with Israel in the Robert Soblen capture, among other issues.

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Myer Feldman – JFK #10

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
454	Arab-Israeli border disputes
457	John F. Kennedy's [JFK] response and his personal letters to the leaders
463	Upholding the United Nations resolution
468	Opposing peace negotiations
473	JFK's involvement in the Middle East
478	King Hussein I and the brink of war
481	JFK's reputation in the Jewish community
485	Israeli-American foreign relations improve in 1963
491	The concept of sovereignty as a factor in the border disputes
498	Cooperating with Israel in the Robert Soblen capture

Tenth Oral History Interview

with

MYER FELDMAN

December 11, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By John Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Today I would like to talk about your experiences during the three years of the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] Administration in handling the Arab-Israeli border disputes, and particularly the actions before the Security Council. Could we start with the initial incident in April of 1961?

FELDMAN: My recollections' a little bit hazy, and all of these tend to merge without some paper in front of me to refresh my recollection. But, if I remember correctly, the dispute in April, 1961 – did that deal with the attempt to keep the road open between Israel and

[-454-]

Mt. Scopus? Well, at any rate, sometime around the time the Jordanians made an effort to close the road between Israel and Mt. Scopus. On Mt. Scopus was the old Hadassah Hospital and a part of Old Hebrew University. The Israelis kept a token force there and once a month they would send a convoy through to Mt. Scopus, and the Jordanians let them do that. Well, early in 1961 the Jordanians made an effort to prevent that convoy from going through, just to show that the Israelis shouldn't exercise any sovereignty over that part of Jerusalem. And there was some fighting. After that there was another instance in which, I believe, the Syrians, this time, fixed on some patrol vessels in the Sea of Galilee.

STEWART: Yes, that was in 1962. The complaint in April of '61 was, Jordan made a complaint about Israel had carried on some, had concen-

[-455-]

trated some troops in ___ for a rehearsal for a parade that was to be held, I think, later in April.

FELDMAN: Yes, that's correct, that's correct. Well, following, following the dispute concerning the, the convoy which went to Mt. Scopus, there were two things that happened. One, the Jordanians then desecrated an Israeli cemetery on the Mount of Olives which is right near there, and the Israelis complained about it. And, then the Israelis, in connection with their annual Independence Day celebration, decided they would have a show of force right in Jerusalem. And the United States policy had always been not to recognize Jerusalem as the, as the capital of Israel, but to recognize Tel Aviv as the capital of Israel. There were various reasons for that because the United Nations, according to the American State Department point of view, considered that Jerusalem

[-456-]

would always remain a center of, at least three great religions, but the Israeli government considered that Jerusalem was its natural capital. Now, with all of this friction with the Jordanians, the Israelis deliberately selected their Armed Forces Day, their celebration of their war of Independence, deliberately selected Jerusalem, as the place where they would have their display of armed forces on their Armed Forces Day, which as I say is the day they celebrated with good result, their war of independence. The Jordanians were very uneasy about this, and they complained that this was a breach of the United Nations resolution. They complained to the United Nations and they complained to the United States, too. And President Kennedy, who was new to office then, received these complaints; he discussed it with me very briefly; he didn't pay a great deal of

[-457-]

attention to this kind of thing at that time, because he was immersed in a lot of other matters, which as you know were of a more serious nature. This was also around the time we were talking about the Cuban invasion and the Bay of Pigs. But we did discuss it, I remember, and discussed it rather philosophically. As I remember it, the discussion dealt largely, not with the particular points of conflict, with whether there should or should not be the major military display in Jerusalem, because, as I pointed out, if the government had already decided on that it would take tremendous pressure to get them to change their minds, and we weren't willing to attempt to do that. Kennedy thought that would be a useless gesture. But, on grounds of just what could be done to remove many of these frictions and to arrive at some method whereby the Arabs and the Israelis could live together. That was

[-458-]

the first time also, that President Kennedy really faced the question whether he could use his offices in any way to bring about direct peace talks between the Arabs and Israelis. He didn't take any strong position either way on that, and didn't pay a great deal of attention to it. But what he did do at that time was something that could have had some fruitful consequences. The Arabs didn't, at that time, have very much confidence in the United States because they thought the American government was very pro-Israeli. Kennedy had promised in a speech during the campaign that he would bring the – in a major speech just preliminary to the campaign, as I remember it in August of 1960 – that he would do what he could to bring the Arabs and the Israelis together in direct peace talks. What he decided to do on the recommendation of the State

[-459-]

Department, of Bob Komer [Robert W. Komer] and of me, and we all agreed on this, was to write personal letters to all the heads of the Arab government, and he asked that such letters be drafted, so that he could re-establish a relationship between the United States and the Arab government that he thought might lead to some fruitful result in this continuous friction.

STEWART: Did this specific thing set this up?

FELDMAN: There had been some suggestion beforehand that this might be a good idea, but when this dispute arose, it became important that we carry it out. So, I can't say that this gave rise to the idea; this gave rise to the action however. And, he did send letters to every one of the leaders of the thirteen Arab cities. He developed a basic text; he felt that he couldn't send exactly the same letter to all of them, so there were modifications of the basic text for each of the Arab leaders. The text went through

[-460-]

eight or ten drafts, I guess, before he was satisfied with it, because he wanted to give just the right impression. He wanted to give the impression that he was seeking a dialogue with them, a continuing dialogue, and that they should feel free to write to him personally and not even through regular State Department channels. And, he wanted to show that he was sympathetic to all their legitimate aspirations. At the same time, he did not want to give the impression that he was siding with them in their conflict with Israel. So the effort was made to achieve a nice balance between the two. Variations in the texts of each of the letters he looked at very carefully. Indeed he discussed the variations in some of the letters with me just to make sure that they would feel that this was a personal interest, and that this would then get them involved in the discussions with

[-461-]

us. Now these letters were supposed to be very secret, and nobody was supposed to know about them, but like so many things in government, there were some rumors that such letters were being sent out that began to appear a month or so after they were sent. And, as I remember it, about six months after the letters went out, Nasser actually publicized a portion of the letter that President Kennedy had sent to him. The President was fit to be tied at that because there had been no prior consultation with him regarding the publication of these letters; he felt the publication was being used as a propaganda move by Nasser, and he considered it a breach of faith. But, following Nasser's publication, I think one or two of the other Arab leaders gave hints that they had received letters also, but none of the others, as far as I know, ever released the fact that they too had gotten them.

[-462-]

The action of Nasser in publicizing the didn't change the feeling of President Kennedy that Nasser was really the key to the settlement of this whole problem. But, it did make him a lot more cautious in his dealings with Nasser. Now we've gotten a little bit away from the dispute itself, but, as I say, I don't remember that we've paid an awful lot of attention to the 1961 dispute. I think it was in June of 1961 that Ben-Gurion [David Ben-Gurion] came to the United States. And then when Ben-Gurion came to the United States, he and President Kennedy and Harman [Avraham Harman] and I met with him, we didn't consider the dispute at that time sufficiently important to even spend much time discussing it.

STEWART: The U.N. mission did vote to uphold the Jordanian complaint, and as you say, I think the parade actually was held ultimately but...

FELDMAN: Yes, but it was a relatively mild resolution,

[-463-]

the Israelis didn't pay an awful lot of attention to the U.N. resolution, and we didn't, we decided we weren't going to get particularly involved. I think the feeling of Kennedy was that there was some basis for the feeling on both sides, and that it would be unwise for the United States to take an active part in it. This was not the State Department's point of view. The State Department, however, did urge the President to get involved in it and to try to persuade the Israelis not to hold the parade in Jerusalem. But Kennedy was not exercised about it at all. I think the much more important and much more time consuming, and much more serious event was the one that occurred the following year.

STEWART: In March of '62 when Israel retaliated.

FELDMAN: As I remember it, the Syrians had shot up some boats on the Sea of Galilee and killed some Israelis, and the Israelis sent a retaliatory

[-464-]

raid into Syria. And then the United States was faced with the problem of what position it should take on the U.N. resolution that condemned Israel for the retaliatory raid. And the President was strongly urged to support the U.N. resolution condemning the Israeli attack. And, in fact, this was the position that we took. Before taking that position, again there were a lot of pressures on the President both ways. In my discussions with him, and I attended most of those he held, he held some with Adlai Stevenson and some with other people on the White House staff, McBundy [McGeorge Bundy], myself, with people from the State Department including Dean Rusk. I urged that he should not take the position that Israel was wrong in making the attack. Now, various drafts of the resolution were submitted. President Kennedy felt that he had to rely largely on Adlai Stevenson, that if he opposed both

[-465-]

Adlai Stevenson and Dean Rusk that they would think there was a serious lack of confidence in them. And, therefore, he would probably have to go along with them. However, he was not too happy in going along with them, because he recognized that there was provocation, and he mentioned the fact that when there is this kind of provocation, there has to be some response to it. So, I was instructed to take a position in any speeches I made, or in any statements I made, that this was not really a White House decision. This was a decision that was being made by the United Nations, by the U.N. Ambassador. That was a tough message to convey, because in fact that was inaccurate, but the President correctly foresaw that there would be a good deal of feeling in the Jewish community anyhow, against the United States taking that position, and since he wasn't completely sympathetic with

[-466-]

it, but felt bound by what his principal advisors said he had to do, we adopted a kind of a public posture that the White House was not involved; now that wasn't really true. The White House was involved, and we did discuss it. I discussed it with Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] regularly, and Arthur was then the White House representative of Adlai Stevenson. Arthur acted as liaison between Adlai and the President. But Arthur did not participate in any policy-making decision, he just would convey the idea, and if I wanted to get a message to Adlai, why I'd tell Arthur, and indeed I went up to New York on one occasion and discussed it with him, Adlai. I tried also at that time to get Phil Klutznick [Philip M. Klutznick] involved in it, I felt that he would be an ally of mine, but Phil wanted to stay out of it. Phil Klutznick then was ambassador to UNESCO on Adlai

[-467-]

Stevenson's staff. So, as a result of our taking the position that Israel was subject to censure for the retaliatory act, there was a strong movement to, at the same time to get the United States to support direct peace negotiations between the Arab states and Israel. As I remember it, this was called the Brazzaville resolution. The Congo Republic in Brazzaville

developed a resolution to which some 21 nations subscribed calling upon the Arabs and the Israelis to enter into direct peace negotiations. I knew, and I told President Kennedy that obviously this was not just the idea of the Congo, that this had been generated by Israel. Now the Israelis told me that they thought they had a pretty good chance getting this resolution passed if the United States would support it. When I asked the State Department and the United Nations people, they told me that

[-468-]

it would be impossible to get enough support to pass that resolution. But, again, the President was in a very difficult dilemma. On the one hand, there can't be any objection to calling for negotiations to discuss peace, and anybody that opposes such negotiations can't have very good reason for it. On the other hand, to support it, he felt, would from the advice he had received would be a rather futile gesture, and it was a bitter cause of abrasions between the Arab states and the other members of the United Nations who didn't oppose direct negotiations. So, if we took the position that there should be direct negotiations, all the Arab states would feel that the United States was siding with Israel and it would be a rather futile thing, so why do it. So, in these circumstances, the question what position should the United

[-469-]

States take. After considerable soul-searching, a kind of compromise, I think, was decided upon which didn't satisfy anybody. We did not support the direct peace negotiations, even though Golda Meir, the Israeli Foreign Minister claimed that we had promised that we would support them, Dean Rusk had promised her that we would. But we didn't support it, on a technicality really. It came up as an amendment to a resolution dealing with refugees. We took the position that we wanted the resolution passed as it was. There was this amendment to the resolution and there were amendments that were being proposed by the Arab states. We took the position that if we let any amendment be voted on, that the Arab states amendments, which are much more serious, they called for a custodian for property in Israel, they called for repatriation of Arab refugees in Israel,

[-470-]

and so on. We took the position that if we supported any amendment to our resolution, which was a simple extension of the resolution that the refugees should be provided for.... Their amendment also called for, instead of a three-nation Palestine Conciliation Commission, a five-nation Palestine Conciliation Commission, which would reduce the effect of the friends of Israel on the Commission. So, we said we had to oppose all amendments, and that would include the direct peace negotiations amendment, which didn't have any chance anyhow, and for that reason, we opposed all of it. But the combination of the censure of Israel and the opposition of the direct peace negotiations resolution, I think, caused serious dissatisfactions at least in the Jewish community of the United States, with the positions being taken by the Administration. A lot of this dis-

[-471-]

satisfaction centered on Adlai Stevenson, rather than on President Kennedy, however, but he felt it in the letters and talks he would have. So, he came out of that year, out of '61 not in too good shape, I'd say.

STEWART: How specifically were you involved in trying to quiet down this opposition?

FELDMAN: Well, a good deal. We haven't discussed what we did, but at the same time we were designing against Israel in these public things, we were doing a number of things privately, and those people that knew what the United States was doing to strengthen the economy of Israel were willing to overlook the public things that were being done. We did a good deal, and I guess we'll get into this sometime later, to increase the economic assistance that they were getting through AID; to, for the first time, give them long term military assistance; to give

[-472-]

the military weapons they wanted, the Hawk missile, which was the first time we gave them a major weapons system, and in connection with that, this we'll discuss later, we called a meeting in the White House of leaders of Jewish groups, people who could spread the word about the sympathy of the Administration. I think it was very effective and what could have been a serious source of disenchantment with the Administration was toned down considerably, although the papers, the Anglo-Jewish press and some of the other things continued to point to it, it wasn't that significant because others who were leaders would say, 'Well, we know the American government is really doing right by the state of Israel.'

STEWART: As far as these individual disputes, particularly in the one March of '62, just how deeply into facts of the whole situation did the President want to go, did he feel he should go?

[-473-]

FELDMAN: Well, the Middle East was never at the top of Kennedy's agenda. Berlin was important, the Congo was important, Viet Nam was important. The Middle East kind of simmered in the background all the time. He would call me, I think, in connection with anything dealing with the Middle East and we discussed it. And on one occasion, I remember after our discussion, he asked me to call Dean Rusk and tell him the results of the discussion and tell him that we were taking a particular position, and Dean Rusk said to me – and Dean's a very good friend of mine, I like Dean Rusk, I admire him – "Now I want it clearly understood that I'm running the State Department and not somebody in the White House, and if there's any doubt about that I want to go to the President." He was quite upset about it. Dean Rusk was always very

conscious of his prerogative as Secretary of

[-474-]

State, and I think always represented a little bit, in a nice way however, any interference or anything that I would do in that regard. And I told the President about this, and the President said we had to keep Dean Rusk fully advised, had to keep him happy and from then on I think, he was inclined to carry messages to Dean Rusk himself, rather than through me. But, the answer to the question how deeply did he get involved in the Middle East is only as much as necessary I think is the answer to it. He would become involved if I would go to him and tell him there was a very serious problem, and I suspect that...And I perhaps was flattered by the fact that he'd rely a good deal on my judgment. I told him from the very beginning that...I remember when I first came into the White House and he first asked me to go into the Middle East problems

[-475-]

I asked him whether he really meant that I should do this because I said quite frankly that I had an emotional sympathy with Israel, and I was sure this would color any advice that I gave him, and maybe he'd want somebody else. And he said to me, 'No', he said he would expect that I would have those sympathies and he would think less of me if I didn't, and that he wanted me to go into it and to keep him advised in anything that was happening that he ought to know about. So I felt perfectly free to go to him at anytime with any questions. I got all the cables, I got every cable dealing with the Middle East that the State Department sent out or that the State Department received, and there was a huge mess of them. And I would discuss with Bundy or with Komer, when he became involved, what ought to be done. And we'd try not to involve the President. But when-

[-476-]

ever there was a disagreement between Bundy and me, and this happened on most major issues even if the disagreement was on a nuance of the American position, and I felt perfectly free to go to the President, and the President was always willing to listen to me. He didn't resist becoming involved. I think his attitude more was, 'Well, I've got competent people, they can take care of it. In most instances where there's a real problem why they'll bring it to my attention and we can talk it out.' Frequently we would, Bundy, the President and I would all meet together, or Komer in some instances. The President and I would meet together to talk out what the result should be. If there was a letter to be drafted, either I'd draft it initially or Bundy would draft it initially, and then we'd try to reach an agreement and bring the letter to the President on which we agreed. Sometimes we would

[-477-]

agree on a letter except for a couple of sentences, or a resolution where there was a resolution of the United Nations involved. We'd come to the President with the resolution and our

disagreement, and he would resolve it. So, I think the answer to the question is that he didn't really center all of his attention on us so that he could initiate things, he depended on us to do the initiation. But he gave as much attention to it, and spent as much time on it as was required. Except in one instance that didn't achieve the proportions of any of the other major international problems. The one instance was when there was a very real threat of war in the East, and that was when King Hussein [King Hussein I] was challenged. There was a good deal of subversion, and it looked as if he would be undermined by Nasser. And our intelligence indicated that the next

[-478-]

48 hours were critical. This was in either the end of '62 or early of '63. But as I remember it, Hussein was under attack by other Arab elements and there was a tough weekend. I think we were called into the President's office on a Friday; we met again on Saturday, and again on Sunday to go over all the most recent reports of where Hussein stood and whether or not he was going to be able to keep the throne. We had McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] in too, to tell us what the military situation was like, and we got the best intelligence reports from Israel to see whether Israel was going to move to the West Bank if Hussein was overthrown. And it looked like if Hussein was overthrown that Israel would take over the West Bank and that would confront the United States...

STEWART: They had always said they would....

FELDMAN: Yes. The West Bank of the Jordan. This

[-479-]

would confront the United States with a very difficult choice; should they send troops in to drive the Israelis back, or would they help carve up Jordan, or what should they do? Now we never decided that issue. I had a feeling that what we would have done would have been to try to move in the minute Hussein was threatened, because we did move the Sixth Fleet. The Sixth Fleet was at Gibraltar. We directed that it move toward Israel, and it was on its way to Israel when we got word that Hussein was reasonably secure, and they didn't have to go all the way, and so we sent new orders to the Fleet that said they could either put in at Rome or either go stay at Malta – Malta, that's right, and they didn't have to continue on to Haifa. But, that was a tense weekend and the President devoted full attention to that because it looked like the beginning of the possibility of a

[-480-]

real war. Now, the Egypt, if Israel moved into the West Bank, Egypt couldn't sit still. They'd have to attack, and if Egypt attacked, why then the whole, all the Arab states would be involved. So, again to answer your question, except for that one instance when most of the initiatives were the President's. He called McNamara, he had McNamara on the phone

most of the time, and called him over to the office and he would follow the developments very closely. In fact, only he knew what action he would have taken if Hussein had been assassinated or had fled the country.

STEWART: Let me just ask you a slightly unrelated question, but it's related in a way. As far as the President's reputation with the leaders of the Jewish community in this country, did the image or the reputation of his father have

[-481-]

any influence at all?

FELDMAN: Well, it did originally when we started our campaign for the Presidency. One of the major handicaps that we had to overcome, in the Jewish community anyhow, was the feeling that his father had never been a friend of the Jews, and that therefore, he took on a little bit of coloration of his father and should not be supported. But, once the candidate was Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], when he was running against Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], this was fairly serious because Humphrey was considered friendly to the Jewish community, but once Nixon became the opposition then there wasn't too much of a problem there. We prepared numerous brochures and I made a good many speeches, and I met with a good many people in order to overcome this. It was not only the father image; Jews are generally liberal, and Kennedy recognized this. He used to say to

[-482-]

me that Jews are liberal he said just as the Catholics are normally conservative. And I'd say, 'Yes, but you're a liberal Catholic and I'm a conservative Jew.' But, anyhow, it wasn't only his father, it was also the conservative coloration of his background, perhaps, and his father's background. It was also charges that were leveled at him regularly for not being strongly in favor of civil rights, for being pro-McCarthy. All these, though not ethnic problems would influence this great body of Jewish voters. You recognize it, and so as I say we produced a good many brochures, or really mimeographed sheets, which would counter these charges, and they were very important up to time of the Republican convention. Once Nixon was the opposition, then no liberal could support Nixon and it just left a question of choice why they'd come to

[-483-]

Kennedy.

STEWART: But after he was president there were...

FELDMAN: After he was President, there was little or none of that. Sure, you'd read it occasionally, very infrequently. Before he was president, when he was still seeking the nomination you had people like Eleanor Roosevelt who would attack him, Jackie Robinson and others once he became President they became great supporters. Eleanor Roosevelt became a great friend of his, although she really attacked him in the book she wrote, attacked him for being pro-McCarthy, and various other things. So, as I say, it was not much of a problem as President, we faced that problem only while he was running for the presidency.

STEWART: Well, to get back to the border clashes in August, 1963 at...

FELDMAN: _____, yes.

[-484-]

STEWART: The end result of that was the United States resolution being vetoed by the Soviet Union. This clash was relatively minor in comparison with the 1962...

FELDMAN: Well, in 1963, I guess we went to the other extreme, because I remember I made a speech, with Senator Kuchel [Thomas H. Kuchel], following the American position at the United Nations. And Senator Kuchel in his speech attacked the Administration, it was before the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, a big audience at the hotel in town here.

STEWART: May of '63...

FELDMAN: Yes. And Senator Kuchel, who couldn't find anything in '63 to attack, kept referring to the 1962 resolutions and the American position there and he pointed out each of the vulnerable points before this audience. And when I got up, why I said, "Well, now he's told you

[-485-]

about history, let me tell you about the present." And of course I talked about 1963. There our position was unacceptable from the Israeli point of view. In fact, in one of the votes, I remember, at the Assembly I'm sure that only Israel and the United States voted together on the....I've forgotten what the issue was, but I think the vote was around 100 to 2, and those two votes were just Israel and the United States. And, the only point that we can be criticized for was one that didn't come up at the United Nations, and that dealt with the so-called Brazzaville Resolution for direct peace negotiations between the Arab states and Israel. This time, I had gone to Israel toward the end of '62, as I remember, no, well I went every year, at least once a year for some purpose, some were secret visits, some were publicized.

[-486-]

But on this occasion, the President asked me specifically to talk to them about what they were doing on their direct negotiations resolution and to point out the position they placed the United States in when they made it. The United States was in a position of either supporting the futile gesture, it was absolutely to get enough votes, or taking a position that really didn't make an awful lot of sense. When you oppose negotiations for peace, you're very vulnerable from a moral point of view. So, the Israelis weren't too sympathetic to the Americans' position. They said that, again with American support, they'd be able to rally enough votes so that this resolution could pass. Well, I tried to show them, I had statistics and I had the nations, and I tried to show them that it's just absolutely impossible to get enough votes for it. But, they nevertheless, continued

[-487-]

their efforts. They said they had to, they felt they had a moral commitment to the people they had talked to earlier to continue their efforts to induce others to support this resolution. Every time a foreign head of state would visit Israel, one of the chief points of discussion, one of the chief items on the agenda was the Brazzaville resolution. Similarly, when the Israeli Foreign Minister or President went abroad to visit other nations, on the agenda was always the Brazzaville resolution. In spite of that, they had fewer votes in '63 than they had in '62 for the resolution, and Golda Meir at long last recognized it, so she did not insist that it be brought up. I think this was a kind of a diplomatic achievement because then we weren't embarrassed by having to vote against it or by finding a technicality under which we wouldn't have to vote on it, or by anything else. Some people who knew

[-488-]

what was going on, there were very few of those, were a little critical of us. Why don't we go all out in support of direct peace negotiations. But, most of the communities forgot about it, and I would say in 1963 our position was completely unacceptable as far as the United Nations were concerned. Moreover, in 1963 we had the advantage of many of the other things that I mentioned earlier that we were doing in Israel. So, 1963, I'd say was a year of firming up very excellent relationships between Israel and the United States. Moreover, in 1963, we began to consider having the Prime Minister, [Levi Eshkol], visit the United States, and President Kennedy decided that he would have him visit the United States at the earliest opportunity. As you know, he didn't come until 1964. But the plans for that visit

[-489-]

were made before Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] took office, and we would have expected a visit from him no matter who was president.

STEWART: As far as this August, 1963 resolution at the UN that was vetoed by the Soviet Union, do you recall any of the circumstances determining what the resolution would be?

FELDMAN: Well, the resolution was actually drafted in the White House. We got drafts from State and from the UN. But Komer and I went over it and made changes. Then it was sent back to the United Nations; they made other changes, on their own, in an effort to get a consensus, to get enough people to support it. But, with all the changes it still ran into the veto. Everybody knew it would anyhow. It didn't come as any surprise, but we wanted it to be the kind of

[-490-]

a resolution that would get the maximum support. I was going to say to be as weak a resolution, it really wasn't that. We wanted as strong a resolution as would get the maximum support, which made it a rather weak resolution, and it was ever weaker by the United Nations people. But, it wasn't of major importance, just putting us on record for a position that we should have taken, I suspect, earlier than that.

STEWART: Okay, is there anything else as far as the border disputes that you can think of?

FELDMAN: Well, there's one other thing that took some of the President's time, and a good deal of my time in connection with the border disputes, and that was the concept of sovereignty. The concept of sovereignty runs all through this period. Israel insisted that Lake Tiberias was wholly within its territory. It also

[-491-]

insisted that it had rights in the demilitarized zone around it. It also, of course, insisted that there should be no interference with any agricultural pursuits or non-military pursuits within that demilitarized zone. Now, many fine questions of international law were raised by these claims, the most important of which, I suppose, was the right of Israeli gunboats to run around the shores of Lake Galilee. When we took office, I think the State Department position was that the gunboats could not approach the shore of the Syrian side. The Syrian territory never actually touches the lake, but it comes within just a few meters of the lake, and the State Department legal advisors' position had been that the gunboats, any military forces could not get within ten meters of the Syrian position, which meant it couldn't get too close

[-492-]

to the shore, and that therefore some of the firing on the gunboats might have been justified by the Syrians. I remember the President's suggestion asking ___ [Abram Chayes], who was the legal advisor to the Department of State to make a full study of the question. And we got a series of memoranda dealing with what, as a matter of international law, the rights to territory were, and what Israel could or could not do within the demilitarized zone, what the

boundaries of the demilitarized zone were and so on. As a result of those memoranda of law, we were able to take the positions particularly in 1963, that the Syrian gun placements were all within the demilitarized zone, but they were in bunkers there were fortified that should not have been placed there because they weren't permitted under the truce agreement. We also finally took the position,

[-493-]

and this I think was a departure from the precedent, and is now the position of the Department I think, I don't think they reversed it again, that all of Galilee was Israeli territory and that Israelis had the right, to not only have their fishermen – we always said that they had the right to have their fishermen any place in the lake – but that they could patrol the lake also. We gave up the previous administrations' insistence that Israeli gunboats should not patrol close to the Syrian shore, but said that Israeli gunboats are allowed to patrol freely in the lake. As I say, this had some influence on, in a sense, our shift of position between 1962 and 1963 in the stands we took on the border incidents. I would attribute that to making the law fit, perhaps sympathies

[-494-]

that the American government had. Apart from that, and apart from other minor matters that arose, there were many border incidents; there was a good deal of Syrian and Jordanian – not Egyptian because that border was well patrolled by United Nations expeditionary forces. There were a good many incidents, but they were treated in a very restrained way; they were called to the attention of the President. The President would say, "Well, is there any action I have to take?" And the answer always, usually was, "No. These are not major matters, and this is just for your knowledge that we're telling you about it." He had other things he concerned himself with, as I say, of more significance.

I think his dominant feeling always was that it was unfortunate that these had to continue. We discussed with him very briefly on one occasion, or I discussed with him very briefly on one occasion the

[-495-]

theory on which he would perhaps center peace in that area. That's interesting. His theory, which I later found, was somewhat similar to the Israeli theory also, was that peace was not going to come by a dramatic incident, and the initiative looking toward direct peace negotiations had failed, and was doomed to failure. The initiative on refugees had failed. A dramatic effort to, by correspondence or by personal intercession serve as an honest broker between Arab and Israel failed. So the only remaining way in which peace could be achieved perhaps would be by a series of very small things, and we ought to encourage this series of what looked like small relationships between the Arabs and Israelis and hope that they would prosper and become larger. For instance, he said he thought we ought to encourage the Jordanian

[-496-]

American Mixed Armistice Commission. The more that they met together, the more Jordan and Israel would learn to work together and this would lead to peace. We ought to encourage Israeli participation in international bodies with Arab countries. For instance, with the International Atomic Energy Commission on which both Israelis and Arabs sat, we'll see to it that they both were on the same committees. We had the DAG, that was the Development Assistance Group, we ought to have both Arabs and Israelis on that. Every opportunity to have both Arabs and Israelis meet together ought to be exploited and ought to be encouraged. And he felt in that way, perhaps you could reach a point in which you could make major agreements. So, I think if I were to express the dominant Kennedy policy in this area, it was one of attempting to

[-497-]

achieve peace by a series of small steps, so that five years or maybe ten years hence, they would be in a position where this could work out. I think that the modern Tunisian attitude reflects this in part. There have been a good many instances in which Tunisians and Israelis have met together. I think the relationship, generally good relationship between Jordan and Israel, despite the recent incident, reflects this policy.

STEWART: Could you tell me about your involvement in the whole Robert Soblen capture and the subsequent events that took place?

FELDMAN: This too, is rather hazy in my mind, but the President called me and asked me whether the Israelis would be receptive to advices from the United States asking for their cooperation in retaking Soblen. He didn't want to do it through diplomatic channels, but he'd

[-498-]

rather do it through an informal channel. I was then in the United States, I was about to leave for Israel, and I said the only thing that I could do would be to talk to the Israeli ambassador, there was nobody else I could talk to, and he asked me to do that. I talked to the Israeli ambassador, and the Israeli ambassador said that this would present serious problems for the Israeli government because of the Israeli government theory that any man who came to Israeli would be protected by Israel if he had any claims to political persecution, and there would be a lot of people there that would claim that it was political persecution. But, he said he nevertheless would take it up with the Prime Minister. He reported back to me later on. The Prime Minister would cooperate, and would do whatever he

[-499-]

could, and they'd just wait for instructions. And then I didn't follow it from then on, I think they then did it through regular diplomatic channels. Later on, however, I went to Israel, I

went to Israel shortly thereafter, I think almost immediately thereafter, and there was quite a vigorous debate in the Israeli press over whether the Israeli government had acted properly. And the Prime Minister himself, who I talked to, had serious qualms as to whether or not he had acted properly. I believe that he did cooperate with the American government only because President Kennedy asked him to. If President Kennedy had not made the request, they would have protected Soblen, and that this is their natural inclination. So, all I know about the event is that the President again used a personal relationship to achieve a national

[-500-]

purpose, and the Israeli government was willing to cooperate because they had such a high regard for President Kennedy. And, really, I suspect against the judgment they would otherwise have exercised.

[-501-]

Myer Feldman Oral History Transcript – JFK #10
Name List

B

Ben-Gurion, David 463
Bundy, McGeorge 465,476,477

C

Chayes, Abram 493

E

Eshkol, Levi 489

H

Harman, Avraham 463
Humphrey, Hubert H. 482

J

Johnson, Lyndon B. 490

K

Kennedy, John F. 454,457-459,462-465,468,472,
474,482,484,489,497,500,501
King Hussein I 478-480
Klutznick, Philip M. 467

Komer, Robert W. 460,476,477,490
Kuchel, Thomas H. 485

M

McCarthy, Joseph R. 483,484
McNamara, Robert S. 479,481
Meir, Golda 470,488

N

Nasser, Gamal Abdel 462,463,478
Nixon, Richard M. 482,483

R

Robinson, Jackie 484
Roosevelt, Eleanor R. 484
Rusk, Dean 465,466,470,474,475

S

Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr. 467
Soblen, Robert 498,500
Stevenson, Adlai E. 465-468,472