



Fulbright's Middle East: A Senator's Influence on American Foreign Policy

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Abstract

This article examines Sen. J. William Fulbright's views of and impact on U.S. policy toward the Middle East, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict. It contributes to the literature on the history of U.S.-Middle East relations and the role of Congress in foreign policy. While Fulbright was not always (or even most of the time) successful in shaping debate and policy along the lines that he advocated, at several crucial junctures, he did have an important influence on U.S. policy toward the region.

Introduction

The life and career of Senator James William Fulbright have been long identified with ideas about foreign policy. A former Rhodes Scholar at Oxford's Pembroke College, then law professor and president of the University of Arkansas, his image as a man of letters was one that he cultivated, and that both his supporters and detractors readily embraced. As a first-term member of the House of Representatives, he proposed the 1943 "Fulbright Resolution" that expressed the will of the Congress that the United States join what would eventually become the United Nations. The international education exchange program that bears his name still stands as one of the best known symbols of American internationalism. His opposition to the U.S.-led war in Vietnam inspired numerous scholarly articles and books (Berman, 1988; Fry, 2006; Powell, 1984; Woods, 1998).

In comparison to international organizations, exchange programs and Vietnam, Fulbright's involvement with U.S. Middle East policy has received much less attention from historians. Early biographies of the Senator made only passing mentions of his views on the Middle East (Brown, 1985, pp. 35–36, 114; Johnson & Gwertzman, 1968, pp. 159, 171). Since that time, biographers and commentators on Middle East issues have taken more of an interest in Fulbright's involvement with the region. In many cases, these assessments primarily reflect the political attitudes of their authors.¹ Two biographies written in the 1990s provided extensive discussions of Fulbright's involvement with the Middle East at various times in his career, but they do not attempt to provide a sustained analysis of the Senator's views on the region or impact on U.S. policy concerning it (Powell, 1996; Woods, 1996). In a recent article, Lazarowitz (2011) has examined Fulbright's "accusations of undue Jewish influence" on the foreign policy process, although this work does not attempt to assess Fulbright's influence on U.S. Middle East policy.



While Fulbright never attained the same level of national prominence on the Middle East as he did on other issues such as Southeast Asia, as this article will establish, he was engaged with the region throughout his career, particularly, but not exclusively during his final term in the Senate (1969–1974). Moreover, since this time, a significant number of U.S. government and private archives have opened, while the transcripts of many Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) executive sessions and other Congressional documents have also been made available to researchers. It is, thus, time for a reassessment of Fulbright’s involvement with the region.

This article examines Fulbright’s views of and impact on U.S. policy toward the Middle East, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict, within the context of the debate over the influence of the U.S. Congress on foreign policy. The Congress is an understudied actor for diplomatic historians and scholars of U.S. foreign policy, particularly relative to the Presidency and other actors within the executive branch, such as the State Department and military. While Fulbright was not always (or even most of the time) successful in shaping debate and policy along the lines that he advocated, at several crucial junctures, he did have an important influence on U.S. policy toward the region.

Fulbright and Congressional Influence on Middle East Policy

Fulbright’s views of the Middle East and of U.S. policy toward this region are not just notable for their own sake, but rather for how they reflect the broader debate over the importance of Congressional influence on U.S. foreign policy in general, and toward the Middle East in particular. The Congress has numerous powers over foreign policy, from the power of the purse and investigation into the executive branch, to the prerogative of the Senate to ratify treaties and approve key executive appointments (Lindsay, 2008, pp. 201–204). For much of twentieth century, the Congress was seen as generally deferential toward the executive branch in matters of foreign policy, only to become more active from the late 1960s onward as part of a reaction to the Vietnam War and other changes. Rourke (1977, p. 259), for instance, once called the relative weakness of the Congress vis-à-vis the presidency on foreign policy one of the few accepted “truths” of political science. Historians such as Johnson (2005: xvi) have challenged this narrative, arguing that the Congress actually played an important role in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy throughout the Cold War period, despite having often been viewed as quiescent. Hinckley (1994) pushes back against this idea, arguing that Congress is less important than it sometimes seems, but many recent studies convincingly argue that the Congress has and continues to play an active role in shaping foreign policy.²

U.S. Middle East policy is often assumed to be one of those issues in which Congress does take an interest. Even prior to the supposed “resurgence” of Congress in the 1970s, the issue of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict “consistently aroused



wide-spread attention on Capitol Hill” (Trice, 1997). Perhaps the best known reason for this is the idea that domestic lobbies in support of Israel play a powerful role in influencing the Congress. Indeed, these lobbies, rather than the Congress itself, have been the focus of much of the research regarding the influence of domestic factors on Middle East policy (Tivnan, 1987, pp. 10–12; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2008; Waxman, 2012, p. 79). The academic literature on opponents of the pro-Israel lobby is even sparser. Certainly, over the years, there have been numerous other Congressional critics of Israel and U.S. Middle East policy, including Bourke Hickenlooper, Paul Findley, and Dennis Kucinich, but no study has yet compared these individuals in terms of their views or impact on policy.³

Detailed case studies of the careers of members of Congress can demonstrate their impact on policy in ways that other types of studies cannot. For instance, many studies of Congress’ impact on foreign policy use measures such as the composition of the Congress (Howell & Pevehouse, 2005) and pieces of legislation passed (Scott & Carter, 2002). This is in part because such measures lend themselves to easy quantitative analysis. Historians, by contrast, can provide descriptions that point to other sorts of impact that cannot be easily quantified. For instance, as public figures, members of Congress can help to shape the public discourse through their statements. They can contribute to the formation of policy through the holding of hearings and questioning of witnesses. Finally, they can actually take measures to prevent Congressional critics from passing resolutions or legislation that would hinder the execution of policy. None of these measures are themselves policy formation, but they shape policy in important ways.

Although Senator Fulbright’s involvement with the Middle East is rarely discussed in this literature, his efforts to shape foreign policy more broadly are. Carter and Scott (2009), for instance, refer to Fulbright as a “congressional foreign policy entrepreneur” (p. 102) who did not simply react to others’ initiatives, but rather undertook his own initiatives to shape foreign policy. Whether this label of “foreign policy entrepreneur” should be applied to Fulbright’s influence on Middle East policy is another question. Indeed, Fulbright’s interest in the region, while evident throughout his time in office, varied greatly. At times, he seemed to go out of his way to specifically engage issues related to the region, but there were also periods of inaction, even at times when the United States was actively undertaking initiatives in the region and one might have expected him to pay closer attention. His motives for these actions also varied. Early in his career, he aimed to court support from Jewish voters in Arkansas, as well as possibly to curry favor among pro-Zionist colleagues. Yet by his final days in office, when the Senator openly opposed actions and policies that he viewed as biased toward Israel, he derived little advantage from his actions in terms of local support, and possibly lost votes as a result.

Despite these variations in levels of attention to the region, the motivations for his involvement, and even the positions he took, Fulbright’s views on the Middle East drew on a set of beliefs about what U.S. priorities in the region should be. In



addition to a general commitment, shared broadly by U.S. policymakers and members of Congress, to preserving the peace in the region, Fulbright's priorities included a) promoting great power accord between the United States and the Soviet Union on the region's politics via the UN; b) supporting Jewish emigration to Palestine prior to 1948, and then afterward, promoting Israel's safety and security, while opposing what he viewed as Israeli "expansionism," and c) opposing (at times vociferously) what he saw as the distorting influence of special interest lobby organizations, in particular the pro-Israel or Zionist lobby, on American foreign policy.⁴ Over time, he remained relatively firm in these beliefs. Throughout these years, Fulbright tended to become more vocally critical of Israel and more sympathetic toward Arab views, which were being influenced by the rise of Arab and Palestinian nationalism. This reflected the Senator's evolving view of Israel as a country that was increasingly secure militarily but not psychologically, and one that needed to compromise to bring about a peace in the region.

Fulbright, the Founding of Israel, and Aid for the Arab Refugees

Fulbright's first legislative encounter with the region came during his single term in the House of Representatives (1943–1944). In 1944, due to Zionist activism, identical resolutions were put forward in both the House and the Senate supporting Jewish emigration to Palestine (Wilson, 1972, p. 66). At least initially, these resolutions never made it out of committee, due to the opposition of the executive branch and the military, which feared that they would make cooperation in the Middle East more difficult and thereby damage the war effort (Pierce, 2011, p. 417). Although Fulbright was establishing himself as an important figure in other areas of foreign affairs, he was not initially vocal on this issue, asking just one question of witnesses during the House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearings on a Jewish national home in Palestine. In these hearings, Arab American historian Philip Hitti testified that he would not object to a Congressional resolution calling for Jewish immigration to Palestine, but he would oppose one calling for the establishment of a "Jewish Commonwealth" there. Fulbright responded by asking Hitti what his alternate suggestion would be, to which Hitti responded that he would "introduce a bill to permit refugees into this country, Jew or non-Jew."⁵ As Fulbright did not ask any follow-up question, it is unclear whether he deliberately wanted to draw out this answer for the record, or if he was just asking out of curiosity. Still, the Arkansan registered his support for the draft resolution in a statement that read "I assure you that I am completely in favor of opening Palestine as a haven for the persecuted Jews as expressed in House Resolutions 418–419."⁶ So worded, this view can be seen as in accordance with Hitti's suggestion that Congress call for immigration to continue, but not for a Jewish political entity in Palestine to be created. In any event, these resolutions were not passed at the time, but after the war ended, they were passed over the opposition of the executive branch in December 1945. There was no roll call vote, but Fulbright



was present in the Senate that day when the measure was unanimously approved.⁷ In the meantime, Fulbright spoke at an annual conference for the United Palestine Appeal in favor of Truman's call for 100,000 Jews to be allowed to immigrate to Palestine.⁸ Fulbright's statement in support of the Zionist cause was doubtless aimed in part to gain the support of the Jewish community, but there is no reason to believe that he did not believe his own words.

Although he supported the idea of Jewish immigration to Palestine in principle, the former Rhodes Scholar did not want it to become an object of contention in U.S.-British relations. This issue came up again during the debate over whether to extend a loan to cash-strapped Britain in May 1946. At this time, there was a great deal of concern that American Jews would oppose this due to Britain's policy against further Jewish immigration to Palestine. As a strong supporter of the American-British relationship, Fulbright took the Senate floor to announce that although he sympathized with those making "difficult and controversial decisions in an election year," he still "sincerely hope[d] the Senate will make a clear-cut decision" to support the loan.⁹ Fulbright's speech was cited in the American Jewish press as an example of how Zionist interests were taking a backseat to broader American interests at the time.¹⁰ It also represents an early example of Fulbright's belief that special interests should not play a strong role in influencing U.S. foreign policy. The Zionist community in the United States continued to view Fulbright favorably. In 1947, Fulbright received a letter of thanks from the American Zionist Emergency Council for support to their cause.¹¹

Tensions continued to grow between the Jewish and Arab residents of Palestine, leading to the outbreak of international war at the end of the British Mandate in May 1948 between the newly declared state of Israel and its neighboring Arab states. There is no evidence that Fulbright commented publicly about the conflict, although according to Woods (1996, p. 258), the Senator favored the creation of the Jewish state. Even after the war ended the following year, when the new state of Israel's security seemed to be on more solid ground, Fulbright continued to advocate for its interests. For instance, at the behest of Jewish constituents in Arkansas, Fulbright took measures to monitor the shipment of U.S. arms to Arab countries. He expressed his concern about the issue to the State Department, which informed him that the United States was only shipping arms that were necessary for "internal security."¹²

During these years, Fulbright begrudgingly supported Israel's consolidation by supporting financial aid to facilitate the resettlement of European Jews in Israel, and Palestinian refugees in neighboring Arab countries through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). The Senator from Arkansas was initially skeptical about these goals, particularly the latter, which he saw as a distraction from development aid.¹³ Eventually, Fulbright did vote for the legislation and funding for UNRWA. Ironically, although Fulbright's actions on behalf of European Jewish



refugees were motivated by humanitarian considerations, at this time, he may have found it difficult to muster the same feelings for Arab ones.

By 1952, Fulbright and some of his colleagues had grown tired of the continual renewals of aid for Israel and the Arab refugees, which he felt distracted from the development aid programs that he favored. During hearings on the Mutual Security Act of 1952, Fulbright sought to establish an administrative distinction between the funds budgeted for the Middle East Point IV development aid (\$55 million) and those for Israel (at that point \$76 million) and the Arab refugees (\$65 million). Fulbright advanced the argument that the latter two categories of funds were for different purposes and should be only temporary in nature, while also criticizing the fact that they were not only “controversial,” but also dwarfed the former.¹⁴ The senator also complained about the relative levels of funding for Israel and the Arab states, asking why the former was more important than the latter.¹⁵ He also remained skeptical about the increasing aid to Arab refugees, complaining that it lacked an end goal such as the resettlement of refugees in another country. A State Department representative countered that the alternative to funding UNRWA might well be “riot, revolution and opportunities for the Russians to move in” to “this very sensitive area,” acknowledging that the “great bulk of the money, frankly, that is asked for these Arab refugees is to maintain them in camps so that they do not constitute a serious threat to the peace of that area, and not a great deal of it is used for resettlement overseas.”¹⁶

The State Department eventually complied with Fulbright’s wishes by creating a separate section within the aid bill for the funds for Israel and Palestine, but Fulbright still wanted to cut aid to Israel, complaining that it was based on the idea that “these Jews in Europe were used to a higher standard of living than the other people in that area.” Israel, he claimed, had received over \$500 million in tax-free private funds from the American Jewish community, while he had had trouble getting a few million for a dam in Arkansas.¹⁷ This suggests that the Senator saw Israel as a country that at this point could take care of itself, and that no longer needed U.S. foreign aid.

During these early years, Fulbright took positions on a variety of issues related to the Middle East. He demonstrated sympathy for Jewish refugees in the period prior to 1948, but at least initially, he did not see aid for Arab refugees as a priority. Rather, Fulbright hoped to promote development aid, which he saw as more effective than other types of aid. Throughout this period, Fulbright does not seem to take a side in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Early on, his good relations with American Zionist organizations suggest that he was sympathetic toward their goals. However, in the aftermath of the creation of the state of Israel — an event that he favored — he was not a strong advocate for aid to the new state. To a certain extent, this probably also reflected the fact that Fulbright initially perceived Israel as a weaker state. Once he began to see it as strong and its neighbors as weak, he would change his position.



Opposing the Eisenhower Administration

By the mid-1950s, as the Eisenhower administration became increasingly involved in the Middle East, Fulbright began to emerge as a prominent critic of U.S. Middle East policy. Three explanations have been offered for this. First, it was politically expedient for Fulbright to criticize representatives of a rival party, particularly after Democratic losses in the 1956 elections (Woods, 1996, p. 213). Second, Fulbright had little affection or respect for Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (Brown, 1985, p. 36). Third, the Senator had fundamental philosophical differences with the administration over U.S. policy toward the region. Woods (1996) sees Fulbright's actions as part "a struggle for an alternative foreign policy" (p. 212). From the late 1950s, the Senator saw U.S.-Soviet competition as moving toward the developing world, including the Middle East (Brown, 1985, p. 34). Fulbright, according to Berman (1988), was "angered by the administration's inability to respond positively to the new currents of Arab nationalism as represented by [Egyptian President] Gamal ['abd-ul] Nasser" (p. 7).

All these factors likely contributed to his emergence as a prominent critic of the administration, but Fulbright might never have had such an occasion to criticize had it not been for the Suez Crisis of 1956. In July 1956, reacting to the signing of an arms deal between Czechoslovakia and Egypt, as well as to the Egyptian recognition of Communist China, the United States suspended an offer of aid and financing to the Aswan Dam project, prompting Nasser to nationalize the Suez Canal in reaction. The Eisenhower Administration was deeply concerned by these events, but it was shocked by an Israeli invasion at the end of October that was followed by the deployment of British and French forces to the Canal Zone in early November. By the end of that month, the United States had pressured Britain and France into withdrawing their troops, followed by Israel in March 1957. This crisis has long been seen as the moment in which the United States effectively replaced the former colonial powers as the main arbiter of regional affairs (Yaquob, 2004, p. 1).

Fulbright's criticisms of Dulles began even before the Suez Crisis. Throughout the early part of 1956, the Secretary of State had made statements to the SFRC that the U.S. position in the world remained strong. Fulbright disagreed. In early 1956, the Senator grilled Dulles in a February SFRC session meeting, then afterward publicly criticized him on the Senate floor, charging that he was not telling the truth about the U.S. position.¹⁸ Yet, as tensions developed with Egypt over Aswan, Fulbright does not appear to have deeply criticized the administration's policy toward the dam itself. In June 1956, soon before the United States decided to withdraw financial aid from the project, Fulbright and Dulles agreed that a recent Soviet offer to aid the Egyptians might be a "white elephant," and Fulbright thought it would be tempting to let them try (and presumably fail) to take over the project.¹⁹ Thus, neither the administration nor the Senator from Arkansas seemed overly concerned about the situation.



However, the Senator's position changed following the Israeli and the European invasion, not to mention the Democratic losses in the 1956 Presidential and Congressional elections. Fulbright now placed the blame on the administration for the crisis (Woods, 1996, pp. 212–218). On November 2, he and five other Democratic senators on the SFRC issued a statement calling the situation the “worst diplomatic disaster in memory,” and claiming that “wiser administration policies would have prevented the invasion.”²⁰ In an emergency committee session, Fulbright asked Undersecretary of State Herbert Hoover, Jr. what “possible solution” there was, as well as for details about the “objective of our policy.” Dissatisfied with Hoover's answer, Fulbright expressed disappointment that the Department did not have “some substantive ideas that you hoped to bring about.”²¹ Soon thereafter, Fulbright left for a month-long NATO conference in Europe, then on his return continued to publically bash the administration's policy as “unwise.”²²

Still, the brunt of the Fulbright's force was only unleashed after the debate over the Eisenhower Doctrine began in early 1957. On January 2, Dulles went before the SFRC to discuss a possible resolution to supplement the administration's authority to act in the Middle East. The Secretary portrayed the planned resolution as a draft that could be discussed and modified prior to its submission to the legislature. Along with a few other senators, Fulbright protested the idea, saying that he could not see the “emergency” that required such a measure, and that he hoped the administration would not divide the Congress by proposing it.²³ In spite of these objections, the President appeared before Congress on January 5 to ask for a resolution that would allow the administration to provide up to \$200 million for economic and military assistance to nations in the Middle East, and to use U.S. military forces to defend the independence of friendly nations from communism (Woods, 1996, p. 221).

Fulbright recognized that the resolution had a significant amount of support in the Congress, but he still made two major attempts to halt or modify the administration's plan. First, as early as January 11, Fulbright announced his intention to submit an alternative resolution on the Middle East that would not give the administration any new powers or allocate any new funds, while also calling for the reinstatement of the UN force between Israel and Egypt and for measures to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.²⁴ However, the Senator did not introduce his draft immediately, even as several other colleagues proposed amendments to the Eisenhower resolution. Perhaps he hoped that the debate would result in a modified resolution. As it became clear that this would not be the case, on January 29, Fulbright infuriated Eisenhower and Dulles by finally proposing an alternative that called for freedom of navigation and a comprehensive peace settlement, but did not authorize U.S. military action (Woods, 1996, p. 221). Fulbright's measure seems to have been debated at length, but it was ultimately voted down in committee.

Second, on January 24, Fulbright asked for a white paper discussing U.S. policy in the crisis (Yaqub, 2004, p. 95). The idea for a white paper went back to the previous month, when, on his return from Europe, Fulbright publically suggested that a



study of U.S. Middle East policy needed to be undertaken.²⁵ Now that the administration sought a Congressional resolution, Fulbright pushed for his committee to conduct the survey itself, although he soon agreed to not to hold up a vote on the resolution.²⁶ Dooming the future report, he also yielded to requests from other senators that the report's scope of inquiry be extended back to 1946.²⁷ In a February 5 news conference, Dulles indicated that such a study would likely require examining hundreds of thousands of documents, so the committee did have some warning of the implications of this.²⁸ By the end of August, overloaded by mountains of paper, Fulbright's committee abandoned the effort (Woods, 1996, p. 225).

Although Fulbright had failed to derail the Eisenhower Doctrine resolution, he continued to pursue what he saw as failings in U.S. Middle East policy the next summer. Following a coup in Iraq in July 1958, the government of Camille Chamoun in Lebanon requested the intervention of American forces in his country in response to rebels who were allegedly funded by Nasser. As during the Suez Crisis, Fulbright charged that the administration had no clear policy in the region.²⁹ As the conflict in Lebanon worsened toward mid-month, Eisenhower met with Congressional leaders on July 14. At this meeting, according to Yaqub, Fulbright apparently accepted "that Nasser was behind the Iraqi coup".³⁰ Yet just 2 days later, the Senator sounded a skeptical tone, noting that "we have never made up our minds what is going on in the Middle East, whether it is a Russian move with puppets or whether there is an indigenous vigorous revolutionary movement based on Arab nationalism and a desire for Arab unity."³¹ On July 29, he reiterated this point, asking a committee witness whether the Communists or Nasser had inspired the coup in Iraq. Fulbright stated that his "feeling" was that "over a long period the only solution to our problem is to find a way to cultivate at least neutralism on the part of these people."³² In a speech read into the record on August 6, Fulbright charged that events in the Middle East, including Iraq and Lebanon, were merely "a symptom of a much more serious malady": that U.S. foreign policy was "outdated" and in need of serious revision. He suggested that the administration consider "neutralizing" the region, and creating a regional development fund to spur economic growth there.³³

Fulbright's criticisms of the Eisenhower Administration's Suez policy was based in part on political concerns, but his repeated pursuit of this issue in the SFRC's closed executive sessions suggests that this was more than just grandstanding. By 1959, Fulbright was openly calling for a Middle East policy that acknowledged Arab nationalism as a significant and legitimate force. In early April, he told CIA Director Allen Dulles that Iraq seemed open to both Soviet and Egyptian influences, but that Egyptian control was preferable.³⁴ In August, he issued a statement that the United States and Arab states should "move imaginatively and boldly toward a new, more mature and realistic relationship," pointing to Nasser's operation of the Suez Canal and Kassim's "independence" in Iraq as signs of political maturity.³⁵ In part, Fulbright's attitude reflected the shifting posture of the Eisenhower Administration, which was attempting to establish what Popp (2010) calls a "working relationship"



with the Nasser regime. This changing position did not escape criticism by supporters of Israel.³⁶ At the same time, as Fulbright himself later admitted on the Senate floor, his “interest in the area tended to slacken because. . . there had been a detectable improvement in relations between the Arab States and the United States — without at the same time a corresponding worsening of our relations with Israel”; that is, until two incidents again “roused [his] interest.”³⁷

Fulbright was growing convinced that U.S. domestic forces were inhibiting the country’s ability to establish a deeper relationship with Nasser. In April 1960, American dockworkers picketed the Egyptian cargo ship *Cleopatra*, allegedly in response to Egyptian searches of American cargo ships headed to Israel. This prompted retaliations in Egypt and other countries against American ships. Although the picketing was resolved within a few weeks, the issue continued to sour U.S.-Egyptian relations.³⁸ Fulbright blasted the action on the Senate floor, implying that the union’s behavior violated the “basic theory” behind the Logan Act of 1799, which banned private citizens from conducting negotiations with foreign governments. This theory, according to Fulbright, was that the country should “only speak with one voice in foreign policy.” This represented an elitist idea of foreign affairs as the exclusive domain of the Presidency, and to a lesser extent, the Congress: “if each individual or group, no matter how patriotically motivated, undertakes direct action in these affairs a disastrous chaos in foreign relations will result.”³⁹ Soon after this incident, pro-Israeli lawmakers in the Senate proposed the Douglas Amendment, which would give the President the right to withhold foreign aid from any nation refusing to grant freedom of navigation. Fulbright called this a “textbook case of how not to conduct international relations,” and requested and received a letter from the State Department stating that it would not help American or Israeli interests.⁴⁰ He publicly blamed American Zionist groups for the amendment, citing “the rise of organizations dedicated apparently not to America, but to foreign states and groups,” which had “seriously compromised” U.S. foreign policy.⁴¹ His remarks prompted a backlash from pro-Israel senators and groups, one of which accused Fulbright of “impugning the loyalty of millions of Americans.”⁴² Fulbright’s statements were supported by Senator John Sherman Cooper and Under Secretary of State C. Douglas Dillon.⁴³ He proposed an alternative to weaken the Douglas Amendment, but his motion was tabled, while the Douglas Amendment later passed.⁴⁴

The Senator’s views on the region, as well as his sympathies, were reinforced by a trip he took to the region that spring at the invitation of Nasser and the urging of Eugene Black, president of the World Bank. Between May 11 and 16, Fulbright met with numerous officials in Cairo, and had two 2-hour interviews with the Egyptian President himself. By the reckoning of the U.S. Embassy, these visits were “frank and friendly,” although they broke no new ground.⁴⁵ Fulbright also visited Jordan and Israel, the latter at the urging of a Jewish friend.⁴⁶ During a small dinner hosted by Golda Meir with just Prime Minister David Ben Gurion and the U.S. ambassador as other guests, Fulbright argued that the actions of what he called “your



people,” such as the groups that pushed for the Douglas Amendment, were not helpful to Israel’s interests. Meir countered that these were U.S. citizens, to which Fulbright allegedly smiled, stating that he meant “your partisans.”⁴⁷ Later that summer, after Fulbright made a public comment about censorship in Israel, he and Ben Gurion exchanged heated remarks.⁴⁸ These clashes with Israeli leaders reflected policy differences, but they no doubt contributed to both public and private views of Fulbright as anti-Israeli.

During this period, Fulbright again began to pay attention to the issue of the Palestinian refugees. At the same time as he proposed an alteration to the Douglas Amendment, Fulbright announced that he intended to offer an amendment endorsing the right of Palestinian refugees to return to Israel or receive compensation. However, he did not put this forward after several senators objected.⁴⁹ While in the Middle East, Fulbright proposed steps toward solving the refugee problem. In Cairo, he said, he had discussed the possibility of solving the refugee issue through an international commission on the basis of repatriation or compensation with at least one Egyptian official (although not Nasser). In Israel, however, his suggestion received an icy reception.⁵⁰ While still in Jerusalem, the Senator vowed to seek to form a committee of experts to deal with the refugee problem on his return.⁵¹ Back in the Senate, however, he conceded that the refugee problem “has been studied to death,” and expressed the hope for some sort of quiet consultations or proposals from experts to deal with the problem.⁵² At least on the issue of the refugees, Fulbright appeared to have few workable ideas to offer.

Fulbright’s irritation of the Zionist lobby apparently helped derail a plan by the newly elected Kennedy Administration to appoint him as Secretary of State. Other groups, including the NAACP, also opposed Fulbright’s candidacy due to his poor civil rights record. Many American Jewish organizations argued that Kennedy should pick someone else.⁵³ Still, as the *New York Times* suggested, the Israeli government “breathed an almost audible sigh of relief” after learning the Kennedy had appointed Dean Rusk instead of Fulbright.⁵⁴

Camelot and Tel Aviv: Fulbright and the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations

Following Kennedy’s election, Fulbright focused less on the Middle East, reflecting a variety of factors, including the country’s growing involvement in East Asian affairs, the relative calm in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and a desire not to publically find fault with a new Democratic administration. Occasionally, behind closed doors, the Senator criticized the vast amount of U.S. aid going to Israel, as well as the influence of the pro-Israel lobby. For instance, in an April 1961 SFRC hearing, Fulbright pressed witnesses from the State Department and U.S. AID on why the United States gave Israel so much foreign assistance. Complaining that the government “could build roads and dam all the rivers and irrigate every inch of [Arkansas]



if you put this kind of money in it," he insisted that they give him a reason other than national security: "I just want you to give the real reason why you are doing it, instead of pretending. Why don't you give the real reason? You know why it is. It is because of the political pressure, isn't it?" Fulbright continued, "There is nothing I can do about it, but I think all of this hypocrisy about this country is ridiculous."⁵⁵ In addition to aid, the Senator expressed his concern about Israel's construction of nuclear reactors to the Kennedy Administration, fearing (quite correctly) that Israel intended to develop atomic weapons, which he thought could destabilize the region.⁵⁶ However, there is little available documentation of his dialogue with the administration on this subject.

Over the course of 1962 and 1963, Fulbright and other senators on the SFRC began to investigate the impact of lobby groups on U.S. policy. This investigation did not only, or even primarily, relate to the groups that were supportive of Israel. The SFRC investigation targeted over 50 different groups, just one of which, the Jewish Agency for Israel, had some connection to that country. According to Woods (1996, p. 311), Fulbright planned to read the transcript of one sensitive hearing on the Senate floor, but a last minute appeal by Vice President Lyndon Johnson stopped him, in part because of the Jewish Agency had admitted that they paid for the expenses of Johnson, a number of campaign staffers, and other members of Congress at the Democratic National Convention in 1960.

Even as Fulbright sought to reduce the power of the Israel lobby, he supported the attempt at reconciliation with Arab nationalism that had begun under Eisenhower and continued under Kennedy. As part of this, he tried unsuccessfully to blunt the efforts of some members of the Senate to put pressure on the President to take a harder line on the Nasser's UAR (United Arab Republic). In November, reacting to fears about Nasser's activities in Yemen, oil company lobbyists and pro-Israel Congressmen united in support of an amendment to a bill altering the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act sponsored by Senator Ernest Gruening that required the United States to withhold development assistance from any country that the President determined was committing "aggression" against the United States or any nation receiving U.S. assistance until that "aggression" had stopped (Little, 1994, p. 291). On the Senate floor, Fulbright proposed a different version allowing the provision to be waived, arguing that the Congress should not tie the hands of the President. After some debate, Fulbright's amendment failed by a vote of 32–46, after which the Gruening Amendment passed with strong support.⁵⁷ It is unclear whether the Kennedy Administration asked Fulbright to take these steps, although they were in touch with Fulbright about the amendment's international repercussions.⁵⁸ As the Senator had predicted, the Gruening Amendment did indeed antagonize Egyptian leaders (Bass, 2003, p. 61).

During Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency, Fulbright increasingly gained a public image as a dissenter due to his challenges to the administration on major foreign policy issues, yet relatively little of his focus was on the Middle East. In the early



years of the administration, Fulbright often supported its policies, even voting for the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin resolution that Johnson used to legitimate increasing U.S. involvement in combat operations in Vietnam. At the same time, however, Fulbright continued to criticize many aspects of U.S. foreign policy. In early 1964, he gave a speech entitled "Old Myths and New Realities," which criticized U.S. policy toward China and Cuba, and even facets of Vietnam policy. But, significantly, it contained nothing about the Middle East.⁵⁹ Nor was the region discussed in detail in his 1966 book *The Arrogance of Power* (Fulbright, 1967), based on a lecture series delivered at Johns Hopkins. As Fulbright, by this time had established a reputation as a public intellectual, some American diplomats thought that Fulbright could educate American public opinion and the Congress about the differences between Israeli and American interests.⁶⁰ But for the most part, the Senator from Arkansas directed his energies elsewhere.⁶¹

The events of 1967 thrust the Middle East back into the center of global politics, as well onto the agenda of the SFRC chairman. As during the early years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Fulbright at least initially hewed closely to the President's line during the run-up to the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War. However, there were some differences between his views and those of the administration, particularly regarding the relationship between events in the Middle East and those in Southeast Asia. As tensions began to grow at the beginning of 1967, Fulbright believed that U.S. involvement in Vietnam was harming the ability of the United States to react to events in the Middle East. In February, David Ness, Deputy Chief of U.S. mission in Cairo, wrote to Fulbright to express his view that the Middle East was in danger, and to ask him to do something; the Senator responded only that he would see what he could do, as the mood was tense in Washington, not the least over Southeast Asia (Woods, 1996, p. 453). After Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran on May 22, Fulbright attended a meeting at the White House in which he and his more pro-Israel, but also fellow dove, SFRC member Stuart Symington told the President that the United States was unable to protect its "vital interests" in the Middle East because of involvement in Vietnam (Woods, 1996, p. 454). Annoyed by their comments, Johnson later asked that Senator Mansfield be told of Fulbright and Symington's comparison between the Middle East and Vietnam, as "this kind of music in the Senate is just what Kosygin wants to hear."⁶² Fulbright's position played an important role in encouraging the Johnson administration to pursue a cautious line during the conflict, as it was already clashing with the SFRC over Vietnam and other issues (Spiegel, 1985, pp. 127–128, 144).

Israel launched the first strike in the war, successfully eliminating most of the UAR's air force and gaining control of the Sinai Desert, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. During the first few days of fighting, Fulbright's thinking seemed on the surface similar to that of the administration. He stated publically that he thought the conflict would produce an opportunity for a long-term settlement over the Middle East and Vietnam. In this scenario, the United States and the Soviet Union



could guarantee free access to Gulf of Aqaba in return for Israeli withdrawal, while the Soviets could use their good offices to bring Hanoi to the negotiating table.⁶³ Yet, even as he pressed for a compromise on Vietnam and the Middle East, he fretted that the United States could not exercise pressure on Israel because of what he saw as the strength of the pro-Israel lobby.⁶⁴ Fulbright's belief in the possibility of a grand bargain between the superpowers that could defuse regional conflicts foreshadowed the Nixon/Kissinger policy of attempting to force the Soviet Union to make concessions in the Middle East or other areas to get progress on Vietnam. Unlike those two, however, Fulbright wanted to involve the UN in the Middle East, calling publically for the International Court of Justice to mediate the dispute over sea lanes.⁶⁵ But still, the similarities in their views would set the stage for later cooperation between the Democratic senator and the future Republican administration.

Not long after the war in the Middle East ended, Fulbright once again refocused his energies on Vietnam, although this would have implications for the Middle East. As the Johnson Administration began to put together an aid package for Arab states, Fulbright threatened to vote against the Foreign Assistance bill, coupling this with a suggestion that the U.S. focus on striking a deal with the Soviet Union over the Middle East and South Asia. McGeorge Bundy, now acting as a consultant to Johnson, told Fulbright that the United States was trying to work with the Soviets, but that they "could not let places like Jordan sink or swim while we waited."⁶⁶ In the meantime, the President leaned on Israel to help it with the war in Southeast Asia. In August, when the SFRC finally brought forward a foreign aid bill, it was smaller and included an amendment by Frank Church that banned military aid to countries whose "economic development would suffer as a result of excessive military spending" (Woods, 1996, p. 464). Thereafter, in October, Johnson asked Eban for help on Vietnam (Woods, 1996, p. 455). Apparently pro-Israel senators made efforts to defeat the Church amendment. Fulbright a few months later let the administration know that he felt "'burned up' about Israeli efforts to eliminate the Church amendment to the foreign aid bill."⁶⁷ As part of hearings on U.S. commitments to other countries, done primarily in the context of Vietnam, Fulbright wrote the State Department to ask whether there was a U.S. commitment to "come either to the military or economic aid of Israel or any of the Arab states." Although the answer was negative, Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban worried that the State Department's message could have a "pernicious" effect on the Middle East, as Israel's enemies could assume that the United States would not come to Israel's aid in times of danger.⁶⁸

At one point, Fulbright may have inadvertently crossed a line in his efforts on the Middle East. In 1968, Fulbright again became enmeshed in controversy after he allegedly stated publically that Nahum Goldmann, President of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), had told him that the United States should put pressure on the Israeli government to reach a compromise with the Arabs (Chazan, 2009, p. 299). Fulbright later denied that Goldmann had asked for this.⁶⁹ Following the



incident, Goldmann announced that he would not run for the WZO Presidency again.⁷⁰ There is no available record of how this incident affected the Senator personally, but this public indiscretion may in part explain his relative silence on the issue of the Middle East for the next two years.

Fulbright and Nixon's Middle East Diplomacy

At the beginning of 1969, the incoming Nixon Administration faced a decision about how to address the Arab-Israeli conflict. Initially, members of the administration largely agreed that they should engage with the Soviet Union to see if the parameters of an Arab-Israeli agreement could be reached through an agreement between the superpowers. Over the next two years, however, a split developed between the State Department Under Secretary of State William Rogers and the White House Under National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger as to what strategy the United States should pursue in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The State Department argued that the United States should take a more active role in the Middle East peace negotiations; Kissinger preferred that the United States not do so, believing that Israel retained the upper hand and that the Soviet Union and the Arab states should have to bargain to obtain U.S. pressure on Israel. Nixon was more sympathetic to Kissinger's position, but often swung between the two sides (Stocker, 2012).

After the incident with Goldmann, Fulbright resumed his focus on Vietnam rather than the Middle East. During 1969, the Senator did not make any speeches on the Senate floor concerning the region, even as the War of Attrition between Israel and Egypt heated up over the course of the year. When the SFRC heard testimony from the Secretary of State at a public hearing in March, Fulbright did not pose questions about the region.⁷¹ Woods (1996, p. 582) argues that Fulbright was only "dimly aware" of the infighting in the Nixon administration over the Middle East peace. However, he was aware of the philosophical differences between pursuing a comprehensive resolution to all issues and a step-by-step process of achieving incremental agreements. In October, Secretary Rogers testified in a closed session of the SFRC. After the Secretary indicated his desire to attempt to get a total settlement of all Arab-Israeli issues including the refugee problem, Fulbright expressed some skepticism, saying "that is an awfully big undertaking."⁷² But he still sought to keep his distance from the issue, refusing entreaties to get involved.⁷³

Even if Fulbright wanted to maintain a low profile on the Middle East, events eventually pushed him back into the public eye. Although he had previously expressed skepticism about the possibility of achieving a comprehensive settlement in one round of negotiations, Fulbright supported the State Department's diplomatic efforts to broker a peace between the Arabs and Israelis. When other members of Congress tried to obstruct this diplomacy, Fulbright pushed back. In March 1970, the Nixon Administration decided to delay a decision about whether or not to sell



Israel Phantom fighter jets, in part to put pressure on the Jewish state to reach an agreement with Egypt. Members of Congress strongly criticized the President. Fulbright, however, refused a request by Senator Charles Goodell to investigate, and in May, he did not sign an open letter from 73 Senators urging more sales of planes to Israel (Woods, 1996, p. 582). Around this time, an article in the *New York Times* called Fulbright “the one man the Zionists worry about a great deal.”⁷⁴ Some members of Congress sought to get around the SFRC by sending legislation to the Armed Services Committee, which had many pro-Israel members such as Henry “Scoop” Jackson, leading to clashes between the two senators.⁷⁵

By late summer, Fulbright had decided to make a public statement on the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as a proposal. In June, both Egypt and Israel accepted the Rogers Initiative, which simply required both sides to “Stop Fighting and Start Talking,” in the words of the administration. This in turn provided what many observers thought was the best opportunity for peace in many years. On August 24, on the Senate floor, in a speech entitled “Old Myths and New Realities – The Middle East,” Fulbright proposed a security treaty between Israel and the United States, to be concluded at the same time as a UN settlement between Israel and the Arab states that would require them to withdraw from Arab territory. In the speech, he argued that the United States had ties to Israel that stemmed not from security concerns, but from “bonds of culture and sentiment and the special attachment of our Jewish population.” He also noted that “in due course, the Palestinian Arabs will find it necessary to accept the existence of the state of Israel and to recognize that further, futile efforts to destroy the Jewish state will only compound their own suffering.”⁷⁶ Fulbright’s proposal was broadly praised, and although it was not adopted as official U.S. policy, it demonstrated that the Senator was not irreconcilably opposed to Israel.

One key reason that the Fulbright Plan failed to be adopted was the outbreak of what would become known as the Jordanian Civil War. In September 1970, following the hijacking of several planes by Palestinian militants, the Jordanian government crushed the Palestinian resistance in that country. Fulbright supported the Nixon Administration’s efforts to deter a Syrian intervention on behalf of the Palestinians through the threat of a United States or Israeli counter-intervention, thereby facilitating the victory of King Hussein’s forces.⁷⁷ Soon after the end of the fighting, Nasser’s death in Egypt and a coup d’état in Syria caused both of those countries to take a somewhat less militant stance toward Israel, at least in the short term, thus, decreasing tensions in the region. In 1971, Fulbright continued to publically defend Secretary of State Roger’s further efforts to broker a peace between Israel and Egypt, arguing that the chief obstacle to progress in negotiations was the “belief on the part of Israel that the United States and the Senate will back it, no matter what position it takes.”⁷⁸ At the same time, the Senator and his assistant Seth Tillman also began to compile a new book, *The Crippled Giant* (Fulbright, 1972), which would appear the following year, and included criticisms of Israel.



By 1971, as Henry Kissinger's star grew in the public eye, Fulbright's relationship with the National Security Advisor grew stronger. Fulbright and Kissinger got along well, and knew each other socially. They would often meet at Fulbright's house, with SFRC members, much to the annoyance of Secretary of State Rogers, who complained to Kissinger several times.⁷⁹ For some, this meant that Kissinger had effectively "co-opted" Fulbright as his "dupe" (Berman, 1988, p. 199; Woods, 1996, p. 676). Indeed, the National Security Advisor himself may have intended this. After the October War, for instance, Kissinger told Nelson Rockefeller that he was "taming" Fulbright, and had "him under good control right now."⁸⁰ The truth was more complicated. As we saw earlier, Fulbright genuinely supported many aspects of Kissinger's foreign policy, particularly détente. The two also shared a common opposition to Scoop Jackson, an opponent of détente and advocate of the resettlement of Soviet Jews in Israel, a policy that angered both the Kremlin and the White House (Woods, 1996, p. 650).

The 1973 war had little impact on Fulbright's views on the Middle East, but it would shift the nation's views of Fulbright. Soon after fighting began, on *Face the Nation*, Fulbright gave his views on the possible outcomes of the conflict. Any agreement, he said, should meet "Israel's legitimate security requirements," while accepting the principle of nonacquisition of territory by force, except for "insubstantial alterations in territory."⁸¹ Then, in response to a question, Fulbright said it would be best for United States and U.S.S.R. to stop supplying their clients, but that would not happen "because the Israelis control the policy in the Congress and the Senate."⁸² For Fulbright, this was nothing new. He had said essentially the same thing numerous times before, both in the Congress, as well as on the *Face the Nation* program itself just 6 months earlier, when he maintained that the Senate had been "subservient" to Israel, prompting an exchange of criticisms between the Senator and now Prime Minister Golda Meir.⁸³ This time, his comment drew extensive negative attention from the media, damaging him in the upcoming election.

In spite of this incident, the Senator and Kissinger worked closely through the months following the conflict. Fulbright even served as a go-between for Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin during the last ten days of war, and corresponded with King Faisal regarding possible outcomes to the conflict, while unsuccessfully opposing the administration's aid package for Israel (Woods, 1996, pp. 650–651). Fulbright originally wanted to hold off on the hearings regarding this aid until January, while State Department officials wanted them to do it sooner.⁸⁴ However, this provided a negotiating point for Kissinger, who told Meir and Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz that Fulbright had wanted to hold up the assistance due to the energy crisis, requiring "the most massive efforts on my part to get the \$2.2 billion through."⁸⁵

During the first half of 1974, Fulbright finally turned his full attention to the electoral campaign in Arkansas, where he faced a strong primary candidate in the state's governor, Dale Bumpers. Many factors contributed to Fulbright's loss in the Democratic primary election in May, although the Senator himself believed that his position on Israel was among the most important (Woods, 1996, pp. 653–672). However, his



views on the Middle East probably influenced relatively few voters in Arkansas. Fulbright's earlier comments had upset many members of Arkansas' small Jewish community, but he still managed to explain his positions to at least some of them.⁸⁶ Still, the office worried about his chances for reelection in 1974, fearing that Bumpers was seen as the candidate for "Christians and Jews" and that "Jewish money" would line up with Bumpers (Smith, 1985, p. 113). In fact, Fulbright outraised his opponent rather significantly (Woods, 1996, pp. 664–665). Kissinger tried to help out by visiting Little Rock during the campaign, although he privately told the Israeli ambassador that the trip was an "insurance policy" in case Fulbright won — which, he added, was not likely.⁸⁷ At least in part, Fulbright fell victim to the general anti-incumbent sentiment that was present in the elections of 1974 (Powell, 1996, pp. 420–421).

After his electoral loss, the Senator became more vocal about his views on the Middle East. He harshly condemned the increasing frequency and severity of Israeli raids on Palestinian targets in Lebanon, charging that they risked thrusting Lebanon into civil war.⁸⁸ On November 2, Fulbright delivered a speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, the site of Winston Churchill's famous 1946 speech that warned of the spread of an "Iron Curtain" across Eastern Europe (Woods, 1996, p. 672). The symbolism was obvious, and Fulbright added to it by entitling his speech "The Clear and Present Danger." Noting the turmoil unleashed by the October War, the senator called for an Arab-Israeli peace settlement. Israel, he said, should be a "peaceful, prosperous society — but within the essential borders of 1967." The United States, he thought, should appreciate the desire of the Palestinians for self-determination, but they are prohibited from doing so by domestic lobbies. The OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) nations, he claimed, were on a "power trip," that is, "widely, and properly, condemned," but it was difficult for nations such as Saudi Arabia to "accommodate" the United States while it "provides the money and arms which enable Israel to occupy Arab lands."⁸⁹ Fulbright's speech emphasized many of the same themes that had been seen earlier in his career: the need to prevent conflict, the desire for great power cooperation, support for Israeli security but not expansion, and condemnation of the role of domestic lobbies.

Yet by this time, Fulbright's influence in Washington had greatly waned. The speech drew front page headlines in the *New York Times*, but not in other major newspapers, and no senators bothered to offer rebuttals.⁹⁰ Just a few weeks later, the SFRC voted 12-0 on a revised version of a foreign aid bill that included more aid for Israel without notifying or consulting Fulbright, or even the committee staff. Key members did not attend the session.⁹¹ The Senate was moving onward, even one of its best known and most distinguished members prepared to leave.



“Agent of Arabs?” Fulbright’s Post-Congressional Career and the Middle East

After leaving office, Fulbright continued to work on foreign policy issues, both in public and privately. Woods (1996, p. 673) suggests that Fulbright essentially compromised his previous reputation of neutrality by becoming a registered lobbyist for the UAE and an unofficial advisor to the Saudi government. One American Jewish newspaper even labeled him an “Agent of Arabs.”⁹² In 1975, the senator joined Washington law firm Hogan and Hartson, which did a significant amount of business with the Arab Middle East. He also served as an informal advisor to the Saudi government, while receiving the order of the Republic from Anwar Sadat’s government in Egypt (Powell, 1996, p. 426). Indeed, there was something hypocritical about the Dissenter who so often seemed above reproach now earning a living in part by advocating the interests of those associated with one side of the conflict.

Yet, Fulbright’s actual positions on Middle East issues seemed to have changed little from his Senate days. For instance, in a speech at Kansas State University on the subject of the nation’s “vital interests,” Fulbright enumerated a set of what he specifically referred to as interests that were “less than vital — not really matters of life and death for our society, but matters of strong preference to many or most Americans,” such as “the development of India, democracy in Latin America, and the survival and prosperity of Israel.” Still, speaking at the time of the energy crisis, he noted that he did not think it necessary to sacrifice Israel for oil or the reverse, but that maintaining both interests were possible, and that Saudi Arabia was the key to this. In short, he saw space for the United States to broker a peace in the Middle East that would preserve its interests there, as well as accommodating Israel’s security needs. In essence, this had been his position while in the Senate. To achieve this, Fulbright advocated a return to the approximate 1967 borders of Israel, a special status for Jerusalem and independent Palestinian state as keys to a Middle East settlement.⁹³ Fulbright may well have seen his arrangement with his Arab clients as simply a happy consonance of interests that allowed him to advocate for policies with which he agreed, along with brokering the occasional real estate investment and other deals.

At least initially after leaving office, Fulbright tried several times to make a mark on U.S. Middle East policy. In early summer 1975, Fulbright made an 18 day trip to the Middle East, meeting with numerous Arab leaders, including PLO leader Yassir Arafat (Woods, 1996, p. 674). During his visits, he urged moderation. On his return, Fulbright met with Ford, whom he gave an article by Rep. J.W. Symington that argued against the role of ethnic lobbies in influencing foreign policy. Fulbright urged Ford to make a “political statement” during his election campaign that Israel is weak, and needs American pressure to compromise to reach a comprehensive agreement. Ford responded that they first had to try for another interim agreement, so they could say that failed, in which case “I will have 208 million people with me against 6 million Jews.” Fulbright told Ford that he believed that Arafat



would “in fact accept the West Bank and Gaza as a place for the Palestinians to call their own,” echoing what the Ford Administration was hearing through other channels.⁹⁴ Fulbright also gave Ford a paper on the Middle East that noted that during his meeting with Arafat, the Palestinian leader had hinted that “he could be more forthcoming if he had something to show for it, and also warns that if he does not succeed he will be replaced by extremists.”⁹⁵ Still, Fulbright couched his analysis and recommendations in cautious language; if he was trying indirectly to influence the debate within the administration, he wanted to avoid doing so forcefully.

The former Senator also made an effort to contribute to the public debate on the Middle East. Although he was not a paid lobbyist for Saudi Arabia, he penned an op-ed that argued that the country offered the United States “a unique relationship based on assured oil supply, large-scale investment of oil revenues in the United States, and primary reliance on American technology for the development of Saudi Arabia.”⁹⁶ Soon after this, he was contracted by a Washington, DC-based organization to get obtain a labor contract with Saudi Arabia (Woods, 1996, p. 676). Although Fulbright welcomed the conclusion of another disengagement agreement between Egypt and Israel in August 1974, he did so coolly. In memo for Kissinger that month, Fulbright suggested privately that the potential agreement would be either a “major gain or major setback to the national interest,” depending on whether it gained time to create movement for a comprehensive settlement. He warned that “I foresee great troubles if we do not follow through quickly and forcefully on Golan and the West Bank.”⁹⁷ Later, he made his position public. In an October 1975 speech to the Middle East Institute and a subsequent article, Fulbright expressed reservation about the agreement, stating that if it advanced peace, it would be positive, but if it just served as an excuse for Israeli “intransigence,” then it would be negative.⁹⁸ Late in 1976, he agreed to represent the PLO in effort to establish a Palestinian Information Office in Washington (Woods, 1996, p. 676). This effort, however, never led anywhere.

Throughout the remainder of his life, Fulbright continued to weigh in publically and privately from time to time on Middle East policy, mostly echoing his previous efforts to encourage a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace that would include a just settlement for the Palestinian people. As Woods (1996, pp. 679–680) has pointed out, he pleaded for the Carter Administration to bring the PLO into the peace process, although he had little impact on the administration’s policies. He sent a private letter of support to Andrew Young, U.S. Ambassador to the UN during the Carter administration who stepped down in August 1979 after it was revealed that he had discussions with PLO members.⁹⁹ As late as the early 1980s, members of Congress still occasionally reached out to him for advice.¹⁰⁰ But he did not live to see his vision of peace fulfilled.



Conclusions

Fulbright's views on the Middle East remained largely consistent over the years. While never wavering in his belief that Israel should have been created and deserved security, he grew increasingly critical of the Jewish State over the years as its power expanded. Early in his career, he encouraged Jewish emigration to Mandatory Palestine. Later, he shepherded through his committee annual foreign aid bills that contained significant sums for Israel. During the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, he refrained from criticizing Israel, and indeed hoped that the conflict would lead to a settlement in the region. In 1970, he proposed a formal US military alliance with Israel in exchange for a return to the 1967 borders. And although he later became a lobbyist for several Arab countries, his views on the Israel-Palestinian conflict did not waver. He publically and privately proclaimed that the Palestinians would eventually need to moderate their views and accept the existence of Israel. All of this is in line with a worldview that saw the United States as protecting Israel, even if, as he stated at Fulton, he did not believe that this was a fundamental American national security interest.

The Senator also called for great power accord over the Middle East. Early in his career, he felt Great Britain should continue to play its traditional role in the Middle East, as shown by his advocacy of a loan for the country, even as it resisted Jewish emigration to Palestine. Later, after America took Britain's place as the region's primary external arbiter, Fulbright argued for U.S.-Soviet cooperation on Middle East issues, praising the Nixon/Ford/Kissinger to broker a peace agreement between Israel and the Arab states. This basic idea was developed even further in his 1970 peace proposal, which expanded the idea of superpower accord into that of security guarantees by agreement both between the two superpowers within the context of the UN.

Finally, Fulbright's views on the Middle East were perhaps most distinguished by his observations, uniquely vocal among members of Congress during these years, that special interest groups can promote policies that damage the national interest. Fulbright's willingness to speak publically about advocates for Zionism and Israel varied throughout his career, but it remained an important leitmotiv, from his views on the British loan in 1946 until final years of his career, when his oft-cited comments on national television suddenly drew fire in a way that they had never done before. Indeed, the major change over the years was not Fulbright's views on this issue, but rather the American public's tolerance for the utterance of the ideas that he espoused. His views on the role of special interests reflected an elitist view of foreign policy as an area reserved for the executive branch. He showed little appreciation for the idea that public opinion or lobby organizations should play a role in foreign affairs.

In terms of his influence on U.S. Middle East policy, Fulbright's legacy was mixed. Fulbright exemplifies what Carter and Scott call a "foreign policy entrepreneur." He repeatedly took up initiatives designed to shape U.S. policy toward the Middle East and the American domestic debate over the region. That said, he



was largely an unsuccessful entrepreneur. His initiatives rarely panned out. He failed to stop or shape the Eisenhower Doctrine in early 1957. He never managed to significantly slow the development of the lobby for Israel, despite his efforts in the early 1960s. His most significant contribution to U.S. Middle East policy was his efforts in support of Henry Kissinger's diplomacy, when he helped to stem the charge led by Henry Jackson and others against measures that Kissinger took that ran counter to what they saw as Israeli interests. Yet even during this period, his most notable initiative — a peace proposal that involved the United States granting a security treaty to Israel in partnership with the Soviet Union in exchange for Israel concessions on territory — never gained acceptance.

Instead, Fulbright's primary legacy was that of a critic and occasional disrupter. He saw himself as a voice of principled objection whose job was to improve the performance of the executive. And in many cases, he arguably did so. After vehemently criticizing the Eisenhower Administration's reaction to the Suez Crisis, he became a supporter of its Middle East policy. Although he did not have the same views of the region as Kissinger, Fulbright's backing of Kissinger during the crucial period of 1973–1974 helped the Secretary of State to implement his shuttle diplomacy between Israel and the Arab states, resulting in two disengagement agreements. Even in many other cases where he stood nearly alone as the voice of opposition to U.S. policy, he nonetheless played an important role in articulating alternatives. If unsuccessful, they still provided a rallying cry for those opposed to U.S. policy as it stood. His public stances created a space for criticism of U.S. Middle East policy that might have otherwise been silenced by groups that saw U.S. interests as permanently linked to Israel. Thus, Fulbright's example shows us that although individual senators, even in a powerful position such as the chair of the SFRC, may not alone be able to move U.S. foreign policy, although they certainly can shape its course.

Alongside his work on other foreign policy issues, Fulbright stands as one of the twentieth century's most influential Congressional critics of U.S. Middle East policy. His involvement with U.S. Middle East policy demonstrates both the power of Congress and the limits of any one member's ability to influence U.S. policy alone. Even as SFRC chair, perhaps the most powerful position in the Congress in relation to foreign policy, Fulbright's efforts to shape U.S. Middle East policy never truly pushed this policy far from the course that it would have otherwise taken. Fulbright himself would not have been surprised by this. He viewed the role of the Congress not as conducting foreign relations, but as monitoring the executive branch's conduct of foreign relations. In this role, he was a constant presence and influence over the course of more than three decades.

Notes

1. For a critical view of Fulbright by a pro-Zionist historian, see (Druks, 2005, p. 69). For a memorial by an admirer, see (Lilienthal, 1995).



2. For a review of literature, see (Burgin, 1996).
3. Such a task is beyond the scope of this article, but studies such as this one provide a basis for future research in this area.
4. Many of these beliefs have been noted in other works. For instance, Woods (1996) discusses Fulbright's strong support for the UN and belief in the need for cooperation and coexistence with the Soviet Union (p. 676), as well as his opposition to the role of the American Zionist movement (pp. 581–584). On Fulbright's early criticisms of the UN' structure, as well as his hope for the potential of the organization to mitigate international conflict, see (Powell, 1996, p. 41).
5. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearing: The Jewish National Home in Palestine, U.S.GPO, 1944, pp. 250–251.
6. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, "The Jewish National Home in Palestine: Supplemental Statements to Hearings," U.S. GPO, 1944, p. 89.
7. See Congressional Record — Senate, Dec. 17, 1945, pp. 12145, 12189.
8. See "Palestine program gets Dewey's praise," *New York Times*, Oct. 21, 1945; William J. [sic] Fulbright, "Palestine — The only real solution," U.P.A. [United Palestine Appeal] Report, Nov. 1945, p. 4.
9. Congressional Record — Senate, May 1, 1946, p. 4266.
10. See, for example, Charles Benson, "Palestine and British loan," *The Jewish Exponent*, May 24, 1946.
11. Harry L. Shapiro (American Zionist Emergency Council) to Fulbright, Dec. 5, 1947, BCN 51 722, Box A278, University of Arkansas (Fayetteville), James William Fulbright Papers [henceforth JWF Papers].
12. Edwin Rhein to Fulbright, Mar. 18, 1950, BCN 80-F8, Box A141, Folder: Dept of State 1949–1951, JWF Papers.
13. See Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee [ESSFRC], II, p. 166.
14. ESSFRC, IV, p. 239–241.
15. Transcript, SFRC, "Mutual Security Act of 1952," U.S.GPO: 1952, p. 668.
16. ESSFRC, IV, pp. 254–258.
17. *Ibid.*, Apr. 18, 1952, pp. 272–277.
18. Chalmers M. Roberts, "Dulles feeds public 'pap,' Fulbright says," *Washington Post*, Feb. 28, 1956.
19. ESSFRC, VIII, pp. 514–515.
20. "6 Senators score GOP on Mideast," *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1956.
21. ESSFRC, VIII, pp. 626–627.
22. Allen Drury, "Fulbright terms foreign policy 'unwise' and harmful to West," *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1956.
23. ESSFRC, IX, pp. 25–26.
24. James Reston, "Fulbright seeks to modify plan for Middle East," *New York Times*, Jan. 12, 1957.
25. Humphrey to Fulbright, Dec. 18, 1956, BCN 121 F23, JWF Papers.
26. ESSFRC, IX, p. 101.
27. ESSFRC, IX, p. 106. See also (Woods, 1996, p. 223).
28. See Foreign Relations United State [henceforth FRUS], 1955–1957, XVII, Doc. 44 [Editorial Note].
29. ESSFRC, X, p. 483.
30. Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism*, p. 225.



31. ESSFRC, X, pp. 534–535.
32. ESSFRC, X, pp. 665–666.
33. Congressional Record — Senate, Aug. 6, 1958, p. 16317.
34. ESSFRC, XI, p. 32.
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