

LIBERAL ARTS

Troublesome Ally, Strategic Asset: The Nixon Administration and Israel, 1969–1970

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Richard Nixon's policy toward Israel changed between 1969 and 1971. This thesis, which examines the state of U.S.–Israeli relations during the first two years of the Nixon presidency, giving particular attention to the influence of the so-called Black September Crisis, is an account of the causes, significance, and implications of that policy shift. Through the lens of memoirs, government publications, and declassified documents held in the Nixon Presidential Library in Yorba Linda, California, this essay traces the path of U.S.–Israeli relations from January 1969 to December 1970. Here I make the case that the Nixon administration's favorable treatment of Tel Aviv in the months immediately following the events of Black September reflected a change in the administration's thinking about Israel's value as a strategic partner. Israel's tough, pugnacious approach to Middle Eastern affairs between 1969 and early 1970 caused a cooling of relations between

Washington and Tel Aviv. The hijacking of three commercial jetliners on September 6, 1970 and the outbreak of civil war in Jordan two weeks later, however, changed that. The same firm, inflexible Israeli attitude that the Nixon administration rejected before the conflict became something that it valued and considered effective during it. Israel's tough diplomatic posture, operational capability, and willingness to assist Washington in managing the crisis demonstrated its capacity to operate as a strategic partner. The resolution of the crisis in late September 1970 marks the point when the Nixon administration began to view Israel more as a strategic asset than it did a diplomatic liability.

Research advisor William Gray writes, "Bradley's thesis substantially enriches our understanding of Nixon's diplomacy in the Middle East. Using archival sources from the Nixon Library, Pierson vividly portrays a thorny hostage situation and the specter of civil war in Jordan. Psychologically, we can better comprehend why Nixon and Kissinger welcomed Israel's inflexible 'macho' posturing."