

WASHINGTON DATELINE

BY TRUDE B. FELDMAN

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Special Interview With Ted Kennedy

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Senator Edward M. Kennedy said that the United States should immediately enter discussions with Israel to arrange for the use of Israeli Naval facilities.

He also reiterated his strong support for Israel's security, and argued that Israel is "so strategically important" that our assistance to that country is an investment in Israel's security as well as in America's.

In an exclusive interview in his Senate office, Kennedy discussed his views on the Middle East and the impact of OPEC oil power on the U.S. economy. The Massachusetts Democrat expressed firm opposition to an independent state for the Palestinians and criticized the Carter Administration for a policy of confusion that resulted in its diplomats making a number of contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

He said he favors a solution to the Mideast conflict through a dialogue among all interested states. "Israel and Egypt have already proven that such a dialogue can be successful," he noted. "The Camp David Accords established a fair and just basis for negotiating a West Bank settlement and gave Palestinian Arabs the means to participate in determining their future.

"The U.S. should avoid developing its own plan or imposing a settlement -- implementation of an autonomy plan must be left to the negotiating parties." Kennedy added that any autonomy plan should include the basic principle that an independent Palestinian state would be detrimental to United States interests, and the interests of our friends and allies in the region. "An independent Palestinian state would serve as a potential threat to stability in the area and would encourage Soviet encroachment," he said. "The PLO should not be a party to negotiations because of their terrorist activities, their refusal to recognize United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 and the PLO Covenant, which denies Israel's right to exist."

Kennedy was particularly critical of President Carter's policy in this area, declaring: "Basically, I take exception from what I consider to be a confused policy the Carter Administration has with regard to the PLO, where some members have had informal contact in Vienna, capped by Dr. Brezezinski shaking hands with Yassar Arafat in Algiers.

"That kind of acceptance of terrorism or terrorist organizations has to raise questions in the minds of the Israeli people and of their Government officials. It also gives credibility and standing to a terrorist organization, which

can be extremely dangerous to the future course of events in the Mideast.

"I am opposed to an independent state for the Palestinians," he continued. "That is not the issue before us. The question of the future of the Palestinians is something that has to be worked out through negotiations between Egypt and Israel and negotiations are taking place now. I'm hopeful it will be worked out satisfactorily with other Mideast countries joining in the negotiating process so we can get an ultimate settlement of peace. But it cannot be a settlement imposed by the United States."

He added, that, obviously, Israel has to be concerned with "security rather than with land. That has been understood all along. The U.S. has to work closely with Israel to make sure it has the kind of secure borders and has full and modern weapons to defend its vital interests and the U.S. must support that."

Kennedy said that he has been impressed by the fact that Israel surrendered -- last November 25 -- the Alma oil fields it conquered. "Now Israel is dependent upon the international market for the purchase of oil,"

he observed. "It is costing her in excess of \$350 million a year. I have supported increasing the assistance to Israel by that amount in the next appropriations."

Kennedy's proposal for added assistance to Israel pre dated recent Israeli requests. It was higher, however, than the \$200 million increase recently proposed by the Carter Administration.

Asked if Israel were willing, would he favor setting up an American naval base in Israel, Kennedy replied that for over 30 years, Israel has been our trusted ally -- as a democratic and stable nation among Mideast instability. "Again and again, Israel offered its services to the U.S. in whatever areas it felt it could be helpful," he emphasized. "Israel is prepared to accept American use of its oil for naval or air facilities. I believe current international conditions demand that we promptly enter into discussions with Israel regarding the possibility of U.S. - Israel naval or military cooperation, the details of which should be worked out both bilaterally and taking into account the conditions of the region."

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