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ABSTRACT

The scholarly consensus regarding the CIA and the Six Day War holds that the Agency's intelligence enjoyed a clear impact on President Johnson's policy and thereafter markedly improved the White House-Langley relationship. Yet this narrative places excessive emphasis on the role of the Agency, while additionally overlooking several other international and domestic contextual factors that would have informed Johnson's policy decision-making. Subsequently, evidence also suggests that Johnson's relationship with the CIA and its intelligence did not improve after June 1967, and that DCI Helms did not become a close confidant of the President.

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Introduction

1967 was a turbulent year for President Lyndon B. Johnson. His strategy of attrition in Vietnam was beginning to unravel, and despite the remorselessly rising number of troops deployed to South East Asia it was apparent that the search for a swift victory had become fruitless. The once safer ground of domestic politics also offered little respite. Loyal allies were questioning whether he should lead them into the approaching presidential election, the press were sensing a growing credibility gap between the facts of the war and the White House's rhetoric, and civil unrest was beginning to boil into what became the riots of the long, hot summer of 1967.

And in June the Middle East offered a further test for the President, with the tensions between Israel and the Arab coalition of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria finally leading to full military conflict. The fighting was limited to just six days, and directly involved neither the United States (US) nor the Soviet Union, yet the war was nevertheless a critical moment for Johnson and American Cold War foreign policy. If Israel had been defeated the US could have lost their strongest ally in a region of vital strategic importance and the door would have been opened to further Soviet influence. Yet, despite this potential danger, the Johnson administration would decide to keep America from becoming fully embroiled in the combat and leave Israel to fight, and win, the war alone without further assistance.

Historians of intelligence have long considered the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) accurate prediction of a quick and comprehensive Israeli victory to be the most fundamental and influential aspect in Johnson's decision. Powers claimed that the White House's policy was 'based on CIA estimates',¹ Andrew argued that the President was 'persuaded' by the Agency's assessments,² and Priess found that the Johnson administration 'adopted policy' due to the intelligence analysis.³ Ranelagh similarly stated that 'the President listened [to the CIA] and decided not to step up aid to Israel'.⁴ The intelligence history narrative subsequently holds that the poor relations between the Johnson administration and Langley were thereafter

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markedly improved, with the President incorporating Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Richard Helms into his inner circle of advisers and making him a regular attendee at the exclusive 'Tuesday Lunch' policy meetings.⁵ Even those who are usually fierce critics of the Agency appear to have accepted this narrative; Weiner has claimed that Johnson was 'impressed' and thus gave the CIA his 'attention' in the future.⁶

This scholarly narrative is only supported by the Agency's former officials and historians, such as Goodman,⁷ Hathaway and Smith,⁸ and Chief Historian David Robarge.⁹ Yet it is Helms' recollections which appear to have been particularly influential, with his memoirs being frequently referenced and perhaps becoming sedimented as received wisdom.¹⁰ Dissenters against the status quo are rare, with Jeffreys-Jones appearing as a lone voice against the dominant line, arguing that the CIA enjoyed little sway over the Johnson administration's policy before, during, or after the war.¹¹

Despite strong support from numerous historians and intelligence officials, these claims about the Agency and Johnson appear to be somewhat exaggerated and stand in need of reassessment. Extensive research by Ginor and Remez has already demonstrated the Agency were largely unaware of a Soviet plan to tempt Israel into a pre-emptive strike and thus provide legitimacy for action against the nuclear facilities in Dimona.¹² And a more nuanced approach suggests there is a requirement for deeper interrogation into the other substantive historical claims around the war. The Agency's assessment of a swift Israeli victory was certainly accurate, and it did provide the White House with support against the Israelis' own defeatist public prediction. Yet there is a lack of evidence to support the claim that the CIA's analysis had the most significant impact on Johnson's policy. Such a claim would be an unsubstantiated overestimation of the role of the Agency, and would simultaneously overlook other influential contextual factors that were present in 1967. This article, supported by archival and secondary sources, proposes four such factors that perhaps had greater sway over the President's decision to curb the American support for Israel.

Firstly, Israel's military dominance in the region was already widely known before the CIA's prediction. Several members of the Johnson administration had already reached the same conclusion, and Israeli officials had even privately admitted that they knew they would win in any conflict. Secondly, Johnson feared that further US involvement in the Middle East would lead to direct confrontation with the Soviet Union. Having consistently sought to decrease tensions with the Soviets throughout his presidency, the White House was therefore keen to avoid any unnecessary escalation in the region. Thirdly, Johnson was already facing intense domestic pressure regarding his handling of the war in Vietnam, and, with Capitol Hill and the American public being unsupportive of action in the Middle East, becoming more deeply involved was politically unviable. Finally, the Johnson administration was likely aware that greater military support for Israel would have further alienated the Arab nations with whom the White House had previously had a particularly fractious relationship.

The apparent influence of the CIA in 1967 is only further negated when considering Lyndon Johnson's prior experiences with intelligence. Johnson is commonly known to have only used the CIA to confirm his preconceived policies and views, while subsequently ignoring any information that contravened it.¹³ This occurred most strikingly in the Vietnam War, but also in other crises such as the Dominican Intervention of 1965. For Johnson to base his Middle East strategy entirely on intelligence from the Agency would have been a complete volte-face on the type of behaviour demonstrated throughout his presidency. Instead, the request for the CIA's prediction was likely only made so as to provide intelligence support to a preformulated strategy, while also giving Johnson material to rebuff calls for increased US support to Israel.

If the CIA had a diminished impact on Johnson's policy, this subsequently suggests that the much-vaunted turning point in the White House-Langley relationship has been somewhat misunderstood by intelligence historians. There is little evidence Johnson's opinion of the CIA suddenly altered, and just as little evidence that the President began to include the Agency in his foreign policy planning. Indeed, the claim that Johnson suddenly made Helms a constant attendee at his so-called 'Tuesday lunches' appears to be erroneous and contradicted by archival sources. Any perceived endearment

to the DCI likely only materialised because Johnson had, on this occasion, received support for his established policy, with the President believing he now possessed a more acquiescent intelligence chief.

Pressure and predictions

In the early months of 1967, it was becoming increasingly apparent that conflict was likely in the Middle East. The Syrian military was being mobilised and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser was frequently making aggressive anti-Israel speeches. Nasser had also expelled a United Nations (UN) force from the Sinai Peninsula in May, thus allowing the blockade of the Israeli port of Eilat.¹⁴ The mounting probability of conflict occurring prompted many in Washington to call for enhanced American support to Israel. Johnson's Ambassador to the UN, Arthur Goldberg, fearful of their ally facing a Soviet backed opposition on numerous different fronts, pressed the President to increase military supplies.¹⁵ There was a perceived 'moral' commitment to Israel held by many in the US, and others in Washington believed that the White House had to come 'more tangibly and quickly to Israel's support'.¹⁶

Lyndon Johnson had long been a strong supporter of Israel, voting in favour of aid packages during his time in the Senate and enjoying close relations with Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol.¹⁷ This support had only grown, and he had become the first President to approve the sale of American-made tanks and warplanes to Israel.¹⁸ Yet in 1967 the pressure to provide additional support was greater than ever. In the event of a complete Israeli defeat at the hands of the Arab coalition the US would have lost a key ally in the Middle East; moreover, Johnson was said to harbour fears over losing the American Jewish vote in the upcoming 1968 election.¹⁹ The pressure placed upon the White House from pro-Israel US officials was only bolstered by the Israelis themselves. Tel Aviv had passed the Johnson administration a Mossad report which 'claimed the Israeli military was badly outgunned by a Soviet-backed Arab war machine'.²⁰ The Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Abba Eban had also told the President that their intelligence suggested an all-out Egyptian attack was being prepared.²¹

In light of the pressure placed upon him to pledge greater support, Johnson asked the CIA to produce their own prediction of the war. DCI Helms had correctly been unconvinced by the Israeli's own assessment, claiming that he believed the 'glum' prediction, intentionally passed on to numerous US officials, was created solely to 'influence foreign opinion', with the Israelis surreptitiously withholding their honest analysis.²² He was therefore unlikely to be surprised when the Agency's prediction, which was presented to Johnson, stated that Israel would win any conflict in just ten to fourteen days without any surge in American support.²³ The CIA faced some scepticism, especially from Secretary of State Dean Rusk,²⁴ but the historical narrative then holds that the Johnson administration based their policy upon this prediction.

The Agency's assessment did of course turn out to be highly accurate. Speaking retrospectively about the CIA's analysis leading up to the Six Day War, Helms stated that such a precise evaluation of Israel's military would have to be 'regarded pretty much as a triumph'.²⁵ The Agency's Center for the Study of Intelligence similarly labelled the conflict as 'the high point of Richard Helms' tenure as DCI'.²⁶ Praise for such accuracy, shared by intelligence historians and members of the Johnson administration, is deserved.²⁷ Yet to claim that the prediction had a 'specific, clear-cut, and immediate impact on US foreign policy',²⁸ would be to overlook a multitude of contextual factors and issues that likely had more of an impact on Johnson's decision.

Other voices

Firstly, the CIA's forecast of Israeli military superiority was far from unprecedented, with it already being widely known that their forces enjoyed a healthy advantage over their Middle Eastern foes. Indeed, other figures inside the Johnson administration had already reached the same conclusion over a year before the CIA's prediction. In March 1966, Deputy National Security Advisor Robert

Komer had noted that the likelihood of Israel being defeated by its neighbours was 'extremely low' and that their security situation was stronger 'than at anytime in the recent past'.²⁹ In fact, Komer possessed so few worries that he believed there were numerous other issues in the Middle East that were of far greater significance to the US.³⁰ The starkly unequal balance of power in the region had thus been evident for some time, and the CIA would later admit that it had 'not been difficult over the years to be right on Israeli military superiority', with it being clear they 'could best any one of their neighbours and probably all of them collectively'.³¹

Leading military figures would also conclude that Israel had full superiority prior to the CIA's prediction. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Earle Wheeler would tell President Johnson that the 'Israelis could hold their own'.³² He was convinced they would 'prevail', that they would have full air superiority, and foresaw no reason for a US intervention.³³ Outside of the Johnson administration, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara would also claim on two separate occasions that the British intelligence community had predicted that Israel would achieve victory in little over a week.³⁴ It is unsurprising that former National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy claimed those who suggested otherwise were simply succumbing to their known pro-Israel biases.³⁵

Yet most revealingly, despite their public attempts to garner further US support, Israeli officials had also admitted to members of the Johnson administration that they knew they would be victorious in any potential conflict. During a meeting in the Pentagon, Abba Eban had confessed to General Wheeler, McNamara, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance that Israel 'believed its forces would win'.³⁶ So, while the CIA's prediction was accurate, their findings were far from being revelatory analysis, and would have made little new impression on the White House. Rusk suggested that Johnson had already mastered the details of the crisis without the CIA, and this is unsurprising given that it was an internationally accepted opinion that Israel possessed superiority in the Middle East, and that Israeli officials had even privately admitted it themselves.³⁷

The threat of a cold war clash

Even if the Johnson administration knew Israel would almost certainly win in any conflict against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, they still faced pressure to act. Eban, even while privately admitting Israel would likely win, had continued to press for further support. 'Surely the US does not intend to stand by and merely watch' he asked in the Pentagon, surely 'the American commitment to Israel was not ... restricted only to the circumstances in which Israel was losing'.³⁸ As discussed, Lyndon Johnson had been a firm backer of Israel for many years and had previously supplied them with arms even when members of his administration had advised against it.³⁹ Yet in 1967 Johnson would provide no further support nor authorise an American intervention into the Middle East. Despite any CIA prediction or Israel's military advantage already being recognised, Johnson's policy was perhaps influenced most acutely by his fears of escalation with the Soviet Union.

The Soviets had become an increasingly significant actor in the Middle East since the signing of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, supplying weapons to Egypt via a Czechoslovakian arms deal and fanning the flames of Arab nationalism throughout the region.⁴⁰ In the prelude to the conflict in 1967, the Soviets had often voiced a strong anti-Israel message and had encouraged the deepening of military alliances between the Arab states.⁴¹ This robust stance appears to have played a crucial role in the Johnson administration's policy, with fears that US intervention into the crisis could lead to a direct clash with the Soviets. The President himself later recalled that he believed the true danger of the Six Day War was not merely confined to the Middle East, and that it could potentially be the spark that led to 'an ultimate confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States'.⁴² He even stated that the conflict was 'potentially far more dangerous than the war in Southeast Asia'.⁴³

Lyndon Johnson's approach to the Soviet Union throughout his presidency had been marked by his attempts to de-escalate tensions and create a semblance of coexistence between the two superpowers. Indeed, much of Johnson's Cold War philosophy demonstrated ideas that generally resembled the *détente* era of the 1970s, with some describing his presidency as an era of '*petite*

détente.⁴⁴ This strategy was partly driven by his anxieties over nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union, which underpinned a softer approach throughout his presidency.⁴⁵ Since the early months of his term of office, Johnson had made tentative overtures to the Soviet hierarchy, offering to host them in the US for constructive dialogue over arms controls, and even telling the Soviet ambassador that he would 'go to bed in the same room with the ambassador without a pistol'.⁴⁶

Just under a year before the Six Day War, Johnson's search for bilateral peace had taken a further step with the signing of the National Security Action Memorandum known as 'Bridge Building'. The Memorandum called for 'peaceful cooperation with the nations of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union', as well as a 'peaceful settlement of the division of Germany and of Europe'.⁴⁷ This, coupled with the Outer Space Treaty of January 1967, were components of a clear move by Johnson to dampen the Cold War tensions and create meaningful cooperation with the Soviet Union outside of the Vietnam War; he even went as far as to tell his Soviet counterpart, Alexei Kosygin, that they shared common interests and duties to humanity.⁴⁸

But the tensions in the Middle East presented a grave threat to Johnson's de-escalation work, and as soon as the conflict broke out in the early hours of the 5th of June the President immediately contacted the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko.⁴⁹ His message to the Soviet minister sought to confirm that the US had no involvement in Israel's attack, and that he believed the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) should seek to end the conflict as soon as possible.⁵⁰ This sense of priorities, captured in Johnson's memoirs, gives insight into how he perceived the Six Day War. The President was evidently concerned that the conflict could lead to a serious Cold War crisis and destroy the work he had done throughout his presidency to control escalation. He thus immediately attempted to avoid this possibility, explaining why he called Gromyko, and not Israel, first. If Johnson was so anxious about the prospect of angering the Soviets even without the US being involved in the outbreak, it is difficult to determine that he ever truly considered an intervention into the conflict, regardless of any CIA input.

This viewpoint is only further supported by Johnson's other recollections from the first day of the war. After contacting Kosygin and assuring him that he would attempt to influence Israel to cease fighting, Johnson then began to push for the UNSC to produce a resolution to end the action.⁵¹ The US were even prepared to support the Soviet Union's proposal of a complete Israeli troop withdrawal, and pressed for all sides to 'refrain from acts of force regardless of their nature'.⁵² It was clear that Johnson's main concern was not the fate of Israel, but was instead the avoidance of an increase in tension with the Soviet Union.

The CIA inaccurately assumed that the Soviets had no plans for a military intervention in the conflict, reporting that they 'do not want the outbreak of a large-scale conflict'.⁵³ Yet despite the Agency's assurances, Johnson's memoirs continue to reveal he constantly thought of the possibility of a US-Soviet clash, and it was on the last day of the conflict that this became an even more pressing issue in the President's mind. On June 10th, after accusing Israel of breaking the ceasefire agreement with Syria, the Soviet Union warned the White House a 'grave catastrophe' would occur unless peace resumed.⁵⁴ The Kremlin even sent a message over the hot line indicating that they would take military action unless Israel halted all of its operations against the Arab states.⁵⁵

Johnson now felt that confrontation with the Soviets was a real possibility, and the US worked quickly to decrease tensions.⁵⁶ There were numerous messages returned over the hotline to Moscow, offering assurances that every effort had been made to convince the Israelis to cease the fighting.⁵⁷ Tensions did reduce, yet this only incident further demonstrates the influence the Soviet threat had over US strategy. If Johnson had been so anxious about Moscow's messages, and so eager to quickly alleviate tensions, how can one conclude that he ever contemplated full support for Israel? The White House had long sought to appease the Soviet Union, and sending further military aid or troops to the region would have been a complete abandonment of this previous strategy. It is thus unlikely that keeping the US away from direct involvement was solely decided upon due to the CIA's assessments, as some have suggested, and was perhaps instead strongly influenced by Johnson's own *détente* efforts and his intense fears of turning the Cold War 'hot'.

Capitol Hill, the American public, and the Arab nations

Closer to home, there were several domestic factors that would have restricted further involvement in the Middle East. Already engaged in a vastly unpopular war in South East Asia, Johnson was said to be worried about the political and social unrest that would transpire from engaging the US in another conflict on foreign soil.⁵⁸ While many historians have acknowledged the pressure placed on Johnson to act in support of Israel, it is imperative to note that there was similar pressure from those opposed to such action. In April 1967, a Johnson ally in the Senate, Jacob Javits, had spoken out against avoiding 'another Vietnam' in the Middle East and the 'heavy price' this would include.⁵⁹ Rusk and McNamara had also met the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the 23rd of May, where they had been told by members that they 'sharply opposed' any US action in the Middle East,⁶⁰ and that any military support of Israel would be condemned.⁶¹

Beyond Capitol Hill, Johnson was aware of the public distaste for an intervention in the crisis. Results of public opinion polls sent privately to the White House showed that a majority of Americans were strongly against formal support for Israel, and that they instead favoured diplomatic efforts.⁶² By mid-1967, the public perception of Johnson had already been blighted by the war in Vietnam, with news coverage showing a futile conflict and growing domestic unrest. His approval ratings had dipped to their lowest percentage since he came into office, and 1967 was the first time more people disapproved than approved of his presidency.⁶³ It remains doubtful that Johnson, who in June 1967 was still considering potential re-election in the following year, would have further enflamed the anti-war movement by launching an unnecessary intervention into another foreign conflict.

Additionally, such an intervention would have only alienated the leaders of the Arab nations, with whom Johnson had shared a prickly relationship with before June 1967. Such poor relations can probably be traced back to November 1964, when rioters attacked the American embassy in Cairo and Johnson retaliated by cutting off all of the previously agreed aid to Egypt.⁶⁴ The White House would contemplate lifting the embargo in August 1965, but Johnson had lost patience.⁶⁵ Perhaps letting personal sentiment define policy, the President was said to dislike Nasser due to his temperamental nature and viewed the region as backward. The feeling was mutual; Nasser apparently had balked at Johnson, dismissing him as nothing more than a 'cowboy'.⁶⁶

Yet the Johnson administration had been aware of the danger that strained relations could cause. Documents from early 1964 demonstrate US concern over the British suggestion of taking a hard stance against Nasser, with the White House worried that this would negatively affect their position in the region and open space for Soviet strategy.⁶⁷ There would be more concern in the immediate build-up to the Six Day War; the CIA reported on the growing anti-US sentiment in the region, with radio stations calling for civilians to boycott American companies such as Ford and Coca-Cola.⁶⁸ When combat broke out, Egyptian and Syrian broadcasts called for the destruction of American interests in the region, and demonstrations took place outside US embassies and other installations.⁶⁹ There were even reports that numerous nations in the Middle East had declared they would cease sales of oil to any state that offered to support Israel.⁷⁰

The potential for diplomatic relations with the Middle East to sour should the US afford further aid for Israel, in addition to the other factors discussed, mean the Johnson administration's policy faced strong influences outside of the CIA's prediction, and was perhaps already formulated without the Agency's assistance. This theory is supported by Ginor and Remez, who suggested that the Agency merely provided 'ostensibly solid grounds for doing what the political leadership was inclined to do anyway'.⁷¹ Robarge, somewhat contradicting his opinions on the Six Day War, similarly asserted that 'presidents are going to get done what they want done' regardless of any intelligence input, and this was perhaps the case in 1967.⁷² So while the Agency's pre-war prediction was accurate, even if their assessments had reached differing conclusions to that of a swift Israeli victory it remains highly unlikely that Johnson would have increased support or deployed the US military into the conflict.

Lyndon Johnson and intelligence

If the Johnson administration's policy had already been moulded by the four contextual factors discussed, it is subsequently probable that the President simply requested the CIA's analysis for political and diplomatic purposes. Such a likelihood is only enhanced when considering Lyndon Johnson's previous experiences with the CIA and its intelligence. Far from being an open-minded consumer, Johnson, driven by his need for consensus amongst advisers, frequently used the Agency and their reports to 'confirm what he already believed', and showed little interest in impartial analysis.⁷³ Instead of using intelligence to inform policy decision-making, the President would regularly use it as evidence to support pre-made plans, or else ignore it entirely.

An example of this can be seen just over two years prior to the Six Day War, when Johnson had pressured the CIA to produce intelligence to support his decision to intervene in the Dominican Republic.⁷⁴ When the newly appointed DCI William Raborn could not supply extensive details of communist involvement in the crisis Johnson deployed the Marines anyway, instead using the Federal Bureau of Investigations to find the information he desired.⁷⁵ In the Vietnam War, such politicisation was even more blatant. 'I need a paper on Vietnam', Johnson had said to Helms, 'and I'll tell you what I want included in it'.⁷⁶ When Helms and the CIA could not comply, and when they produced reports that opposed Johnson's strategy, the President would simply disregard them.⁷⁷

Within the Johnson era, there was far more precedent for intelligence politicisation than for impartial intelligence consumption. Thus, in the case of the Six Day War, to claim that Johnson requested the CIA's prediction simply to advise his decision-making would be to claim that he reversed upon a pattern of behaviour shown previously throughout his presidency. Instead, it is more probable that Johnson requested the Agency's analysis to alleviate the political and diplomatic pressure placed upon him to act. The CIA's prediction thus not only served as a rebuttal to the pro-Israel lobby, but it also provided his administration with support against Israel's own pessimistic public assessments. Johnson's memoirs even detail how he used the Agency to rebuff Eban's appeals, telling the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs that 'All our intelligence people are unanimous ... you will whip hell out of them'.⁷⁸ The claim that the White House listened to the Agency and shaped policy around their analysis therefore fails to consider Johnson's previous experiences with intelligence, as well as the way in which the prediction was used against the Israelis. Far from informing policy, the CIA were perhaps merely used to support it.

A seat at the president's table?

The second historical claim regarding intelligence and the Six Day War holds that Johnson, impressed by the CIA's analysis, thereafter included them within his foreign policy creation. Hathaway and Smith, in their work for the Center for the Study of Intelligence, argued that the 'outcome of the 1967 war swept Helms into Lyndon Johnson's inner circle of advisers, where he remained for the rest of Johnson's term'.⁷⁹ Once again, the DCI's own recollections appear to have been instructive. Helms would later repeatedly state that Johnson had finally understood 'what intelligence could do for him', and assert that he was subsequently invited into the President's 'Tuesday Lunches' where he insisted he gained direct access to the President and his foreign policy council.⁸⁰ Yet an investigation into this narrative, which has been echoed by intelligence historians and other officials, proves it is misleading.

Firstly, it is far from clear that Helms became a new attendee at the 'Tuesday Lunch' because of the CIA's predictions, with some sources even pointing towards him infrequently attending the previous year.⁸¹ Most revealing though are Johnson's personal diaries, which were logged by secretaries to track every telephone call and meeting. These diaries show that Helms would only attend two 'Tuesday Lunches' with Johnson and his advisors in the ten weeks after the war.⁸² Such a record does not suggest he became a 'close confidant' of the President,⁸³ especially when he had attended exactly the same low number of meetings in the ten weeks preceding June 5th.⁸⁴ He would

continue to be a rare attendee for the remaining days of Johnson's presidency, while the diaries also show that the DCI was not present at a number of high-level briefings during the Six Day War itself and had zero contact with Johnson on a number of days.⁸⁵

It is thus uncertain that Johnson's opinions of Helms and the CIA were greatly improved after the conflict. If one looks past the ambiguous matter of the 'Tuesday Lunches', it is even more apparent that the Agency did not acquire any more influence in policy formation. Jeffreys-Jones argued that Johnson acquired little respect for the CIA in June 1967, and instead he now simply believed he possessed a more 'compliant' DCI who would provide intelligence backing to his premade policy.⁸⁶ And Helms' recollections from the era only demonstrate that access did not mean that the Agency-President relationship had improved after June 1967. He later stated that 'On no occasion in all the meetings I attended with [Johnson] did he ever ask me to give my opinion about what policy ought to be pursued by the government'.⁸⁷

Helms also remembered that members of the Johnson administration would press the DCI to 'get on the team', something that Helms knew meant the CIA had to 'trim our reporting to fit policy'.⁸⁸ Accordingly, far from having much influence on foreign strategy, the Agency were only there to give intelligence backing to Johnson's own schemes, just as it had done with the Six Day War, with the DCI being nothing more than a 'fact man'.⁸⁹ The Agency were only to offer objective, impartial assessments and reports, and by this approach Helms attempted to gain the President's personal respect.⁹⁰ Yet beyond any personal sentiments Johnson may have had for his DCI, these recollections show that the President actually displayed little respect for the Agency itself, was perhaps only appeased by a more acquiescent Director, and continued to uphold his narrow definition of what a DCI should do.⁹¹

Johnson had maintained a poor relationship with the Agency throughout his presidency, with his first DCI, John McCone, resigning because of little access to the White House, claiming that Johnson would not read CIA reports or attend briefings.⁹² By 1967, this relationship had soured even further due to the intense disagreements over the success of his Vietnam strategy, with Johnson quipping in typical fashion that '... that's what these intelligence guys do. You work hard and get a good program or policy going, and they swing a shit-smear tail through it'.⁹³ There is little evidence to suggest that such opinions changed after June 1967.

The claims of numerous intelligence historians that the Six Day War became a turning point for Johnson's interactions with the CIA therefore stand in need of revision. Johnson likely enjoyed the fact that the Agency had given further backing to his own strategy when requested, but any perceived improvement in relations had little to do with apparent accurate intelligence. If Helms did feel he had created a stronger relationship with Johnson it was only because, on this occasion, he had reinforced the President's own personal, pre-set strategy.

Conclusion

Evidence suggests that the claims of the Six Day War being one of the CIA's finest moments is perhaps wide of the mark. The Agency had correctly predicted a quick Israeli victory, but this was unlikely to have had a significant impact on US foreign policy. Beyond the recollections of Richard Helms and the upheld narrative, there is little indication the CIA created any cause and effect with their predictions. On the contrary, there is a wealth of evidence that suggests the threat of the Cold War, the potential for enhanced domestic and foreign turmoil, and the fact Israeli superiority was already widely known all played a more critical role in Johnson's decision making. Indeed, the White House likely needed the report only to rebuff Israel's public calls for assistance. This in turn meant that Johnson gained little appreciation for his intelligence service after June 1967. The rest of Johnson's term saw him again clash with the CIA over Vietnam and there was little improvement in the White House-Langley relationship during his remaining months in the Oval Office. So, while intelligence historians have since attempted to portray it as an Agency 'triumph', the Six Day War was actually a rather modest episode.

Notes

1. Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, 224.
2. Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only*, 333.
3. Priess, *The President's Book of Secrets*, 54.
4. Ranelagh, *The Agency*, 474.
5. For Helms and the 'Tuesday Lunch', see: Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only*, 335; Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, 224; Whipple, *The Spymasters*, 35.
6. Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 277.
7. Goodman, *Whistleblower at the CIA*, 55.
8. Hathaway and Smith, *Richard Helms as Director of Central Intelligence*, 139–146.
9. Robarge, *Getting it Right*.
10. Helms, *A Look over My Shoulder*, 298–305.
11. Jeffreys-Jones, *The CIA & American Democracy*, 165–166.
12. See: Ginor and Remez, *Foxbats Over Dimona*; Ginor and Remez, *Too Little, Too Late*.
13. See: Turner, *Burn Before Reading*, 106; Ranelagh, *The Agency*, 422.
14. Oren, *Six Days of War*, 82.
15. Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only*, 333.
16. Policy and Intelligence – The Arab and Israeli War, [No date available], CIA Electronic FOIA Reading Room, Document No. CIA-RDP79T01762A000500040020-8.
17. Tyler, *A World of Trouble*, 67.
18. *Ibid.*, 64.
19. Green, *Taking Sides*, 197.
20. Robarge, *Getting it Right*, 31.
21. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 293.
22. Helms, *A Look over My Shoulder*, 298.
23. Jeffreys-Jones, *The CIA & American Democracy*, 165.
24. Goodman, *Failure of Intelligence*, 65.
25. Frost, *An Interview with Richard Helms*, 1.
26. Richard Helms as Director of Central Intelligence, January 1, 1993, CIA Electronic FOIA Reading Room, Document No. 0005307558.
27. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 278.
28. Robarge, *Getting it Right*, 29.
29. Memorandum for the Record, March 21, 1966, National Security File, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 3, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library [hereafter LBJPL].
30. *Ibid.*
31. 1967's Estimative Record -- Five Years Later, August 16, 1972, CIA Electronic FOIA Reading Room, Document No. CIA-RDP79R00967A001500040010-1.
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