

RFK's Aid-to-Israel Stand May Be Reason for Murder

By J. F. TER HORST

WASHINGTON (NANA)—Ten days before his death, Sen. Robert Kennedy made a typically outspoken proposal that may have influenced the mind of his assassin. He became the first of the presidential candidates to specifically urge the sale of U.S. jet fighters to Israel.

The Kennedy commitment, first made to a Jewish audience in Portland, Ore., on May 26, was repeated June 1 in his widely advertised television "debate" with Sen. Eugene McCarthy in San Francisco, three days before the California primary election.

"WE MUST KEEP Israel secure against outside aggression—with arms if necessary," Kennedy had told the Neveh Shalom congregation in Portland.

"That requires now the selling to Israel of the 50 Phantom jets she has so long been promised. There should be no further delay."

Kennedy's declaration was particularly noted in Jewish and Arab circles, in this country as well as in the Middle East press. On the San Francisco TV show, interviewers asked McCarthy if he would "support Kennedy's position."

"I'VE SAID we had to maintain the military strength of Israel against the Arab nations and I've said we at least have to rebuild the strength that they lost in the recent war," McCarthy responded. "If that means 50 jets, then it's 50 jets."

Thus while McCarthy indicated agreement, the exchange created the impression that Kennedy was the originator, the chief promoter of the jets-for-Israel plan and that McCarthy was only catching up.

By coincidence, there were related references to Israeli jets and Arab-Israeli hostility on election day. As California

voters went to the polls, the Middle East radio broadcast word that Israeli planes again had streaked into Jordan to silence Arab artillery guns reported to be harassing Israeli villages.

ADDITIONALLY, THE day following the primary was to be the first anniversary of the six-day war in which Israel again

had humiliated her Arab neighbors.

It was against this election night background — the Kennedy proposal, Israeli jets over Jordan and the 1967 war anniversary — that Los Angeles witnessed the wild hotel scene in which Kennedy aides wrested a gun from a young Jordanian immigrant now charged with Kennedy's murder.

Is this what is referred to in that notebook, reported belonging to the accused man, which Mayor Sam Yorty said mentioned "the necessity to assassinate Senator Kennedy before June 5, 1968?"

KENNEDY HAS been a staunch friend of Israel for many years. But then, so have all of the leading Democratic and Republican aspirants for the White House in 1968.

Pro-Israel groups in the U.S. have noted with satisfaction that, regardless of candidates' attitudes toward Vietnam, their support of Israel is definitely "hawkish."

Last month, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee solicited statements from Republicans Nelson Rockefeller and Richard Nixon and from Democrats Kennedy, Humphrey, and McCarthy for publication in a special edition of the "Near East Report" newsletter. Commented I. L. Kenan, its editor: "The statements show that all candidates agree there is a U.S. commitment to the preservation of Israel. All would like to see early Arab-Israel negotia-

tions. All would like to see friendship between the U.S. and all the peoples in the Near East. All the candidates are agreed that Israel should receive military assistance from the U.S."

WITHIN THAT general framework, however, there are varying degrees of intensity for the Israeli cause among the candidates. And while McCarthy has generally gotten more Jewish support than Kennedy during the primaries this year, the Kennedy position on Israel at least has sounded more specific and activist, as per his jet plane proposal.

In a major address March 12 at a United Jewish Appeal dinner in New York, Kennedy offered a five-point plan for U.S. policy in the Mideast:

1. Dispel the "false" Arab

belief that Israel can be overthrown.

2. American support for "direct and meaningful negotiations" between Israel and her Arab neighbors (full Kennedy endorsement of the Israeli position) to settle the 1967 war.

3. The U.S. must match Soviet support for Arab countries with equivalent military assistance to Israel.

4. Maintenance of a flexible policy "in the face of Arab shifts . . . We must be prepared to work with Arab leaders when they turn away from the rhetoric of war to the language of realism."

5. Provide foreign and assistance to all of the Middle East, through a special UN development fund, to "better the lives of the Arab people."

Kennedy reiterated this policy position in his April 29 statement for the Near East report newsletter. However, in terms of jet planes for Israel, Kennedy did not then go as far as he was to do later in Portland during the Oregon primary.

IN APRIL, HIS position was that the U. S. should "stand ready" to sell jets to Israel if her neighbors received equivalent arms from the Soviets. In Oregon, Kennedy pushed up the priority and the decision to a "now" basis and said

there should "be no further delay."

Kennedy spelled out his basic Israeli stance in this fashion for Neveh Shalom congregation:

"In Israel, unlike so many other places in the world, our commitment is clear and compelling. We are committed to Israel's survival. We are committed to defying any attempt to destroy Israel whatever the source. We cannot and must not let that commitment waver.

"... IT IS THE very opposite of Vietnam. Israel's government is democratic, effective, free of corruption; its people are united in its support. Our commitment to Israel reflects the fact that the Israelis, as they made so courageously clear during the June (1967) war, will not ask us to do their job for them. To help Israel defend her security, as a matter of morality and as a matter of practicality, is in our most basic national interest."

Just before the 1967 conflict, Kennedy proposed the establishment of a UN naval force to safeguard free passage through the Gulf of Aqaba.

In a Senate speech then he said the U. S. must make clear beyond miscalculation by Arabs or the Soviets that war "could not benefit those who begin it."

THE NEW YORK senator also was a co-sponsor of a bill to stiffen U. S. response to the Arab boycott of Israel. Kennedy likewise co-sponsored a Senate proposal to make \$1,000,000 in Israeli counterpart funds available for Hadassah hospital.

Kennedy's personal involvement in the Israeli cause dates back to 1948 when, fresh from Harvard, he covered the first days of the new Israeli state as a fledgling reporter for the old Boston Post.