

# Kennedy, as Reporter, Came to Admire the Israelis

By PAUL HOFMANN

The Israelis "are a young, tough, determined nation," a 22-year-old correspondent, Robert F. Kennedy, cabled from Palestine to The Boston Post just 20 years ago.

The fledgling reporter, who already revered pugnacity and "vigor," added: "They fight with unparalleled courage. This is their greatest and last chance; there will be no turning back."

The young Mr. Kennedy, between Harvard University and the University of Virginia Law School, served his stint as a newspaperman covering the fighting between Arabs and Jews that, in 1949, was to lead to the establishment of the state of Israel. By his own choice, he lived with Israeli soldiers.

This early experience was recalled yesterday, by persons who had been close to the late Senator Kennedy, as a motif that must be kept in mind in evaluating his relationship towards Jews and Israel. Mr. Kennedy's often professed sympathy for Israel was not a matter of political expediency, some of these sources stressed, but stemmed from an enduring emotional involvement.

## Close Scrapes With Death

It was widely felt yesterday that exploration of Mr. Kennedy's posture toward Israel was relevant because the suspect held in his slaying, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, was a 24-year-old Jerusalem-born Arab immigrant.

One of the late Senator's biographers, Ralph de Toledano, wrote in his generally unsympathetic book, "R.F.K. The Man Who Would Be President" (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967) about how the young reporter narrowly escaped

## They're 'Tough, Determined,' He Cabled Boston Post Just 20 Years Ago

death. An Israeli tank convoy to Jerusalem, in which he was supposed to travel, was wiped out by the Arabs. Mr. Kennedy reached Jerusalem with the help of an Israeli tank Captain.

Another biographer, Margaret Laing, who is British, wrote in her book, "The Next Kennedy" (Coward-McCann, 1968), that the young war correspondent's praise for the Israelis was his first public statement on a political issue.

Miss Laing continued: "Suspicions of anti-Semitism still (probably unfairly) clung to his father [former Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy], but for the son, the Jews had the qualities he admired most. And as time passed, his emotional commitment to them was to grow. He increasingly believed that he could communicate with them."

## Admired Jewish Spirit

Reached at her home in London yesterday, Miss Laing said in a telephone interview that she had spent three weeks in 1966 with the Senator and the Kennedy family. The Senator admired "the spirit of determination and discipline" of the Jewish people, whom he considered an underprivileged community, the British author recalled.

Senator Kennedy was planning to revisit Israel sometime this year. A Washington lawyer, Maurice Feldman, was making tentative arrangements.

"The plan wasn't publicized," Mr. Feldman said in a telephone interview yesterday, "because the visit might have been interpreted as a political move." Senator Kennedy's travel

project was first discussed last autumn, then again earlier this year, Mr. Feldman said. He said he himself visited Israel about two months ago, conveying messages from Senator Kennedy to Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, Defense Minister Moïshe Dayan and other officials. Mr. Feldman said he was not at liberty to discuss the terms of the messages, but he emphasized that "Israel could not have had a better friend" than the Senator.

## Criticized in U.N. By Arab

Throughout his political career, Mr. Kennedy made many statements favorable to Israel and was a frequent speaker in Jewish, Zionist and pro-Israel gatherings. He emphasized his support for Israel before, during and after the Middle East war last summer.

His stand drew a harsh reaction from an Arab spokesman in a United Nations Security Council debate on the Middle East crisis last June 12. Jamil M. Baroody, who has been Saudi Arabia's representative at the world organizations for more than 20 years, pictured Mr. Kennedy as a pro-Zionist, describing him as an "upstart, the son of the whisky merchant."

In 1964, when Mr. Kennedy was running against Senator Kenneth B. Keating, the Action Committee on American-Arab Relations, a militantly anti-Zionist group, portrayed both men as being beholden to Israel.

It was recalled yesterday that Mr. Kennedy was interested in and concerned with the plight of Palestinian Arab refugees because of the work of his brother, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, as chairman of the Special Senate Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees.

## First and Last Names Pronounced the Same

The first and last names of Sirhan Sirhan, the accused assassin of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, are both pronounced the same way, according to Arabic speakers familiar with the accents of Jerusalem, where he was born.

A phonetic rendition into English would be "sir-HAHN." Arabs say the middle H sound is guttural and the last syllable ends with a hard N sound.