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Hathaway and Smith

RICHARD HELMS

CIA History Staff

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RICHARD HELMS

As Director of Central Intelligence

Robert M. Hathaway
and
Russell Jack Smith

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APPROVED FOR RELEASE DATE:
12-03-2008

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1966-1973

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The DCI Historical Series

RICHARD HELMS

As Director of Central Intelligence
1966-1973

Robert M. Hathaway
and
Russell Jack Smith



History Staff
Center for the Study of Intelligence
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C.

1993

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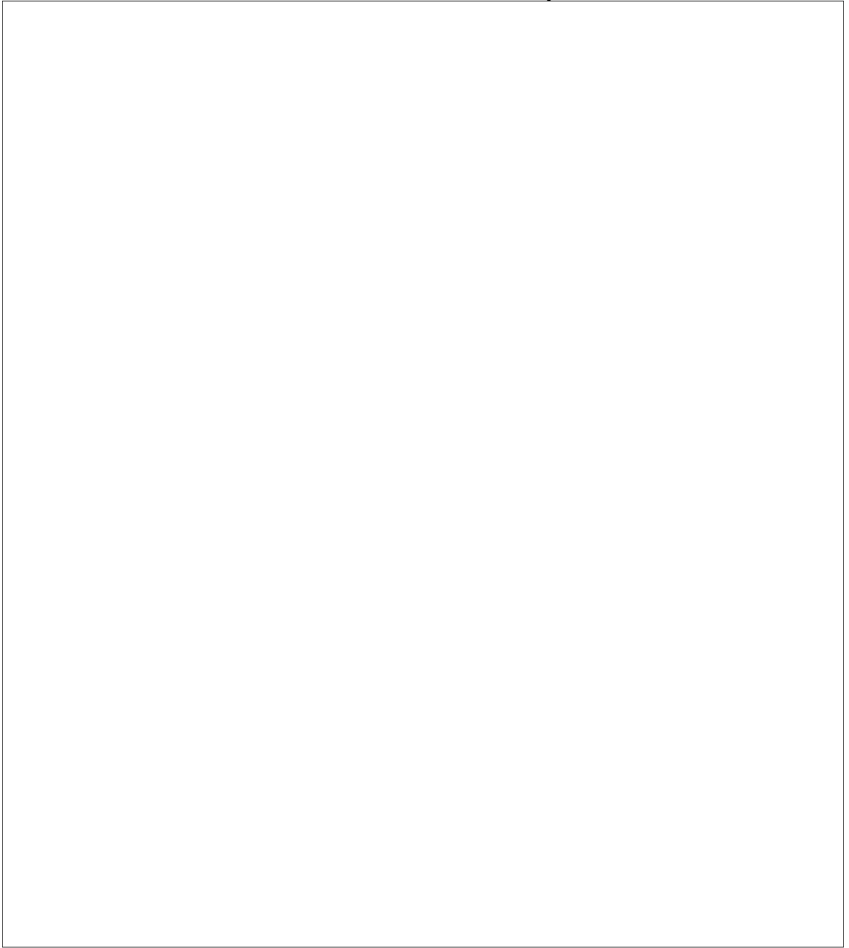
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Chapter 6

The Israeli Account

Robert M. Hathaway

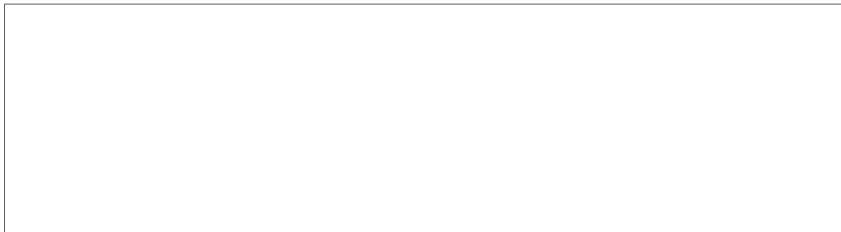


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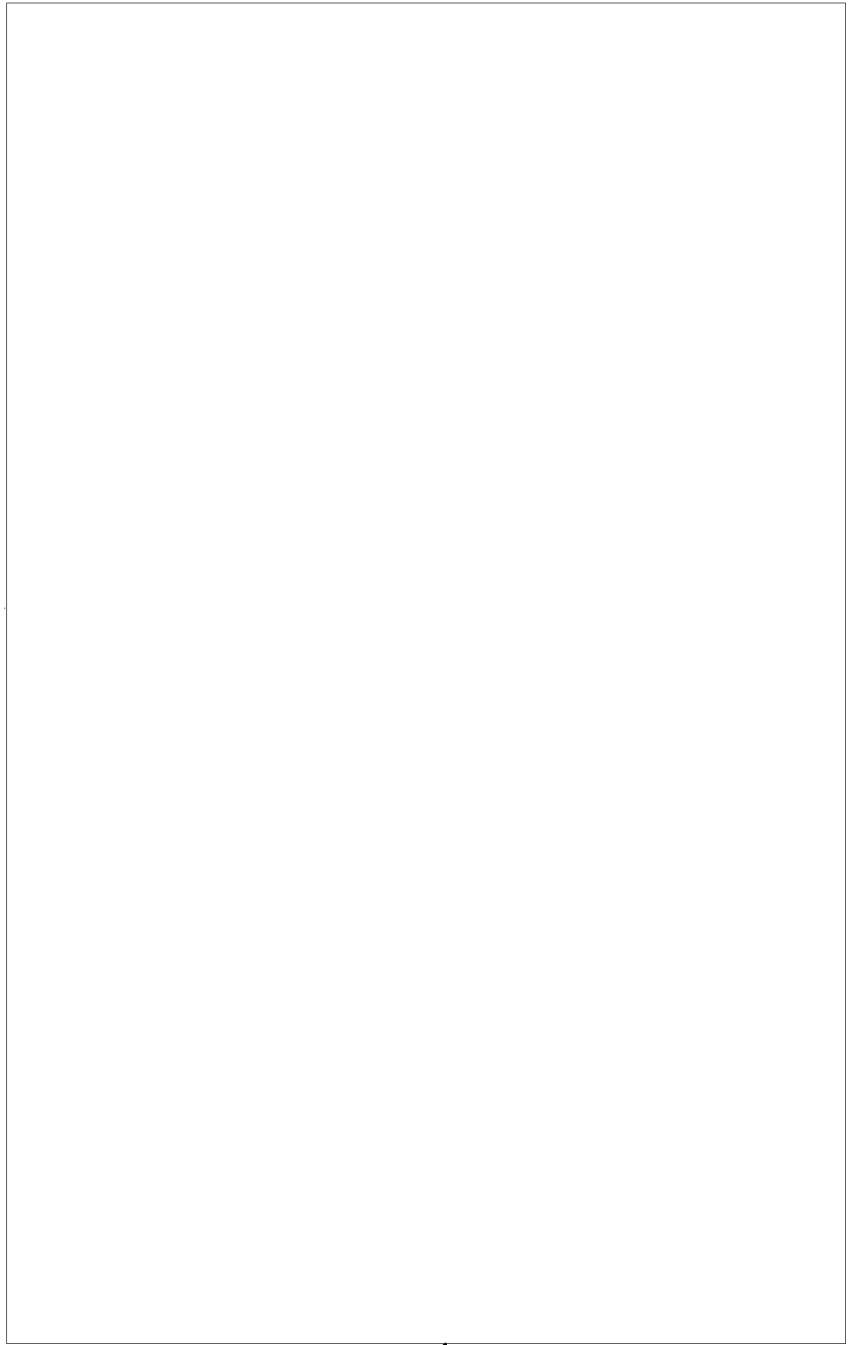
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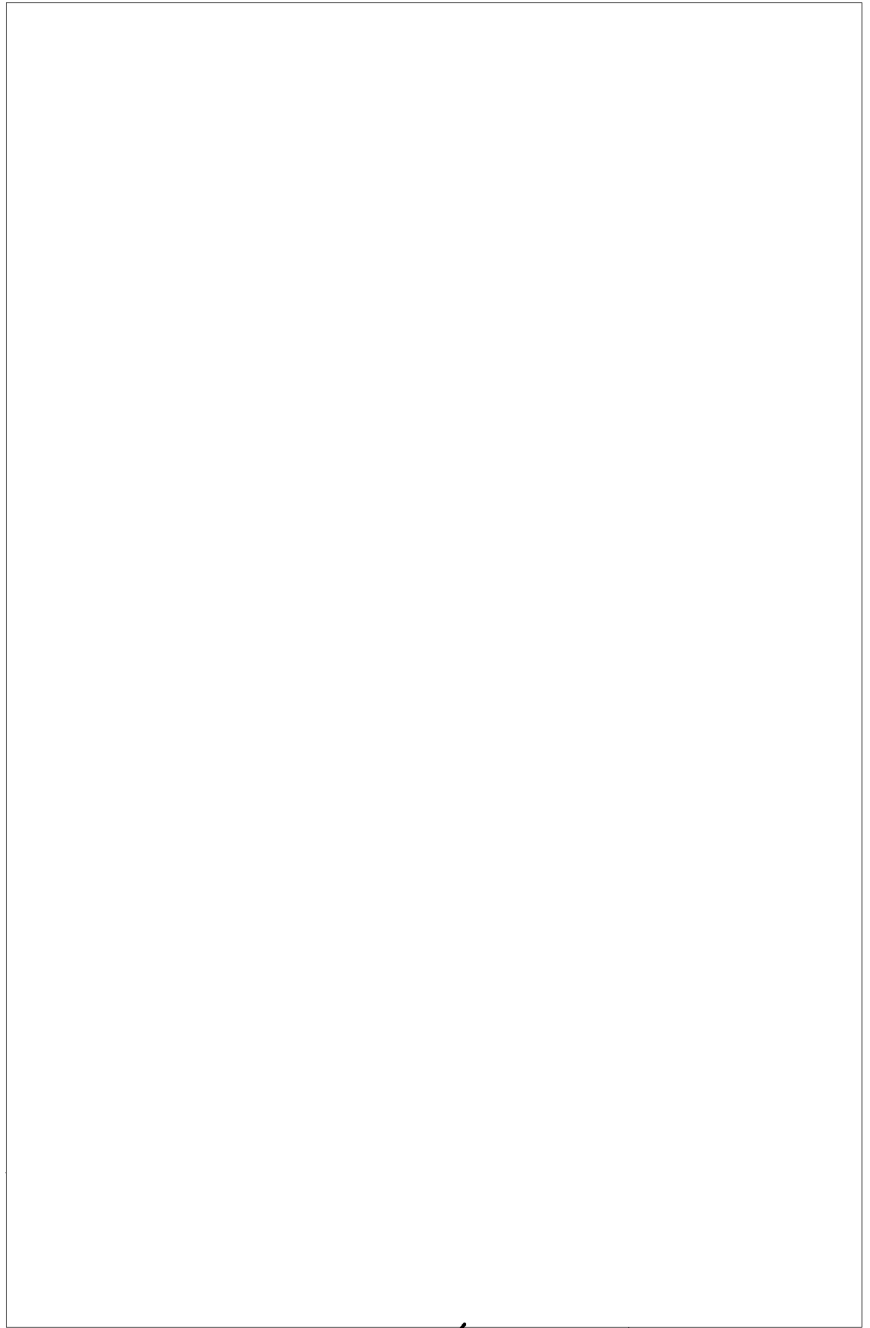
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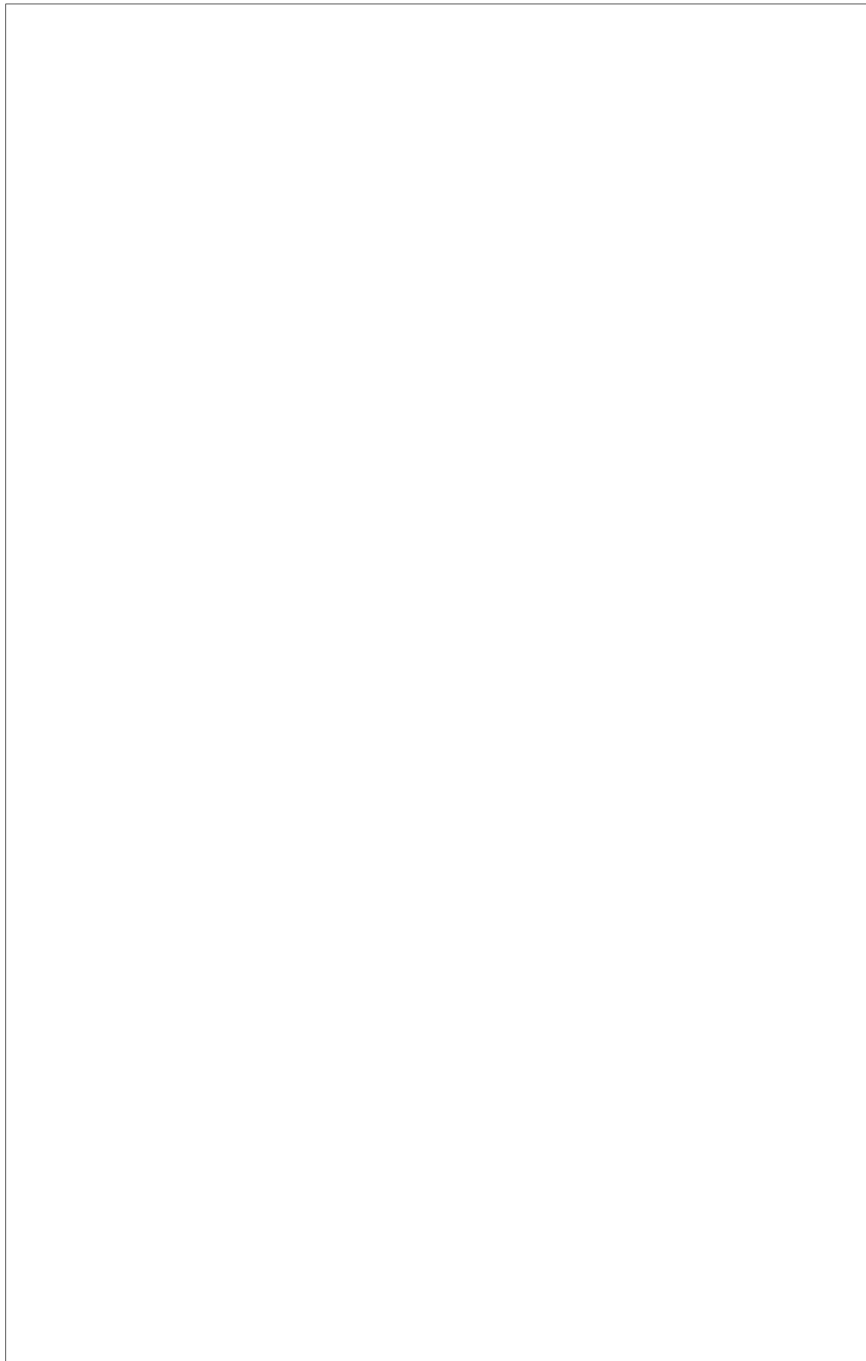
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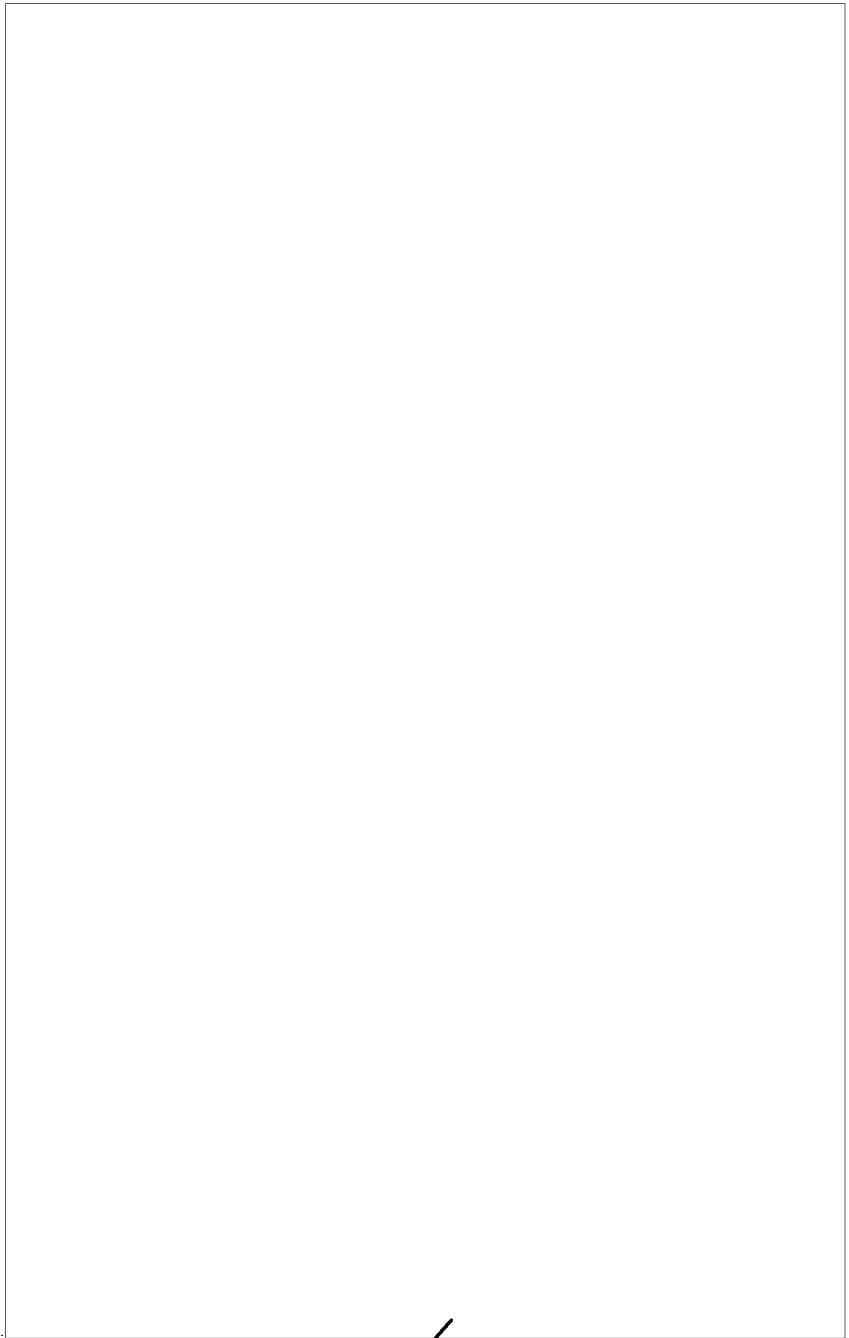


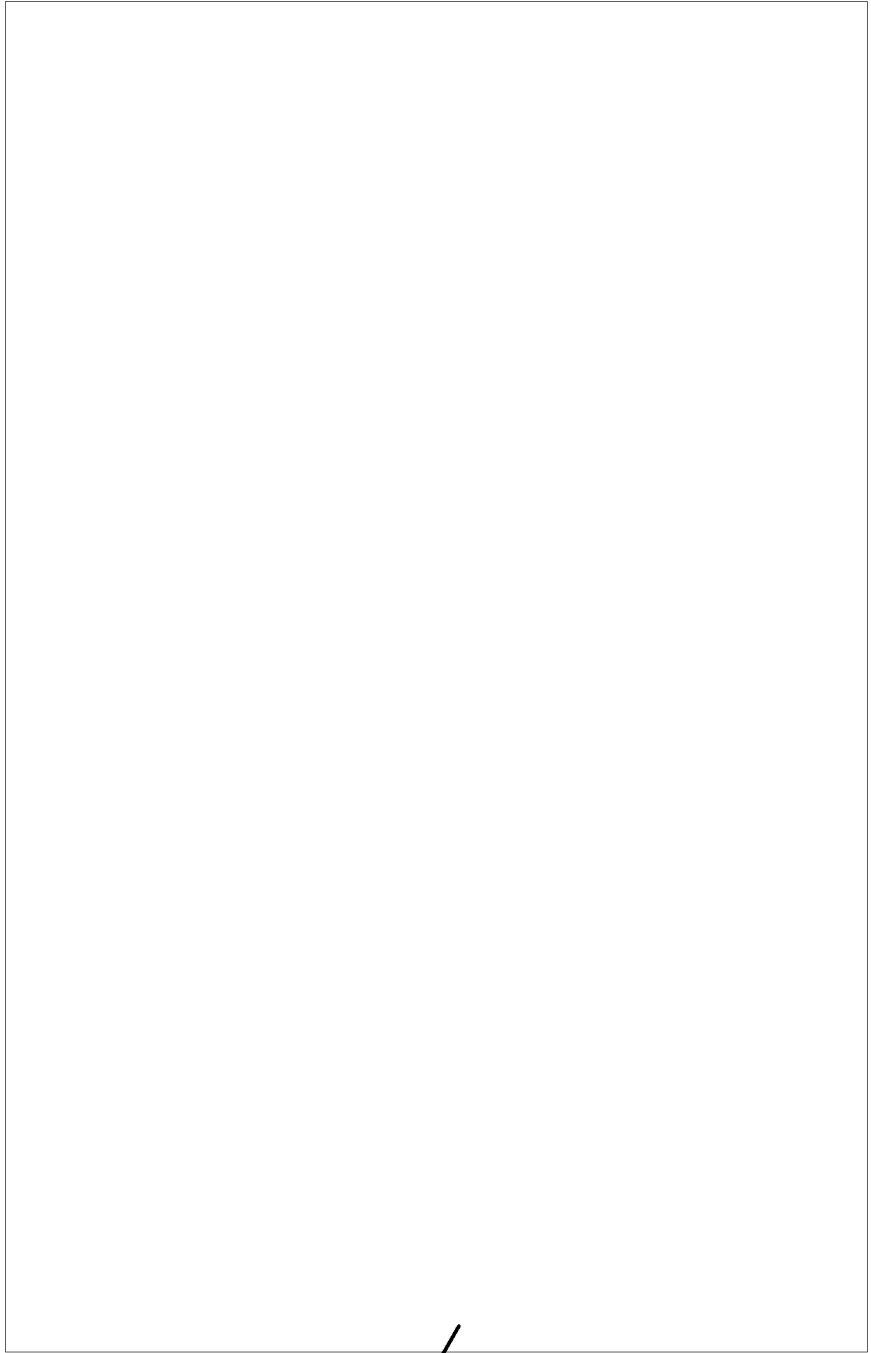


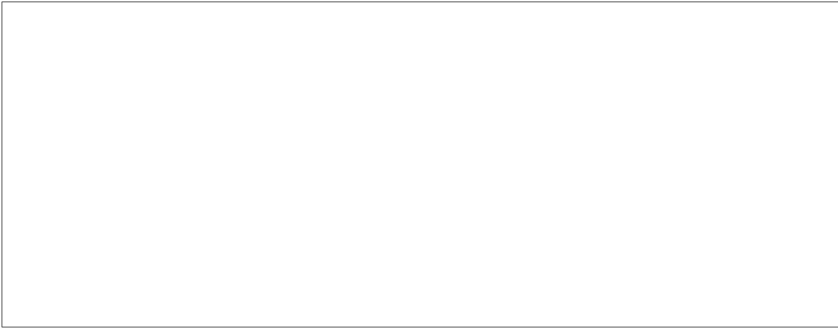


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The 1967 Six-Day War

In many respects, the high point of Richard Helms's tenure as DCI came in the early days of June 1967. On 5 June, Israeli military forces launched a surprise attack against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, bringing to its climax a crisis that had been steadily building for months. For the Johnson administration, tied by political interest and emotional commitment to Israel, the Israeli strike raised grave questions: Could the Israelis triumph without active American assistance? Even should they win, would a costly victory sap Israel's future vitality? What role had the Soviet Union played in bringing on the crisis? How would Moscow react if Russia's Arab friends faced imminent defeat? What steps should the United States now take? Should Washington airlift military supplies to Israel—even at the cost of further undermining the American position in the Arab world?

For the Johnson administration, sound and speedy answers to these questions were imperative. Even before fighting broke out on 5 June, the Israelis had been pressing the White House for public statements of support; there had even been cautious suggestions of joint military operations against the Arabs. Faced on the one hand with great uncertainties, and on the other with high stakes and intense pressures, Lyndon Johnson, Helms recalls, finally "came to understand what intelligence could do for him."¹⁵

For Helms, Middle Eastern developments first took on crisis proportions on 23 May 1967. A week earlier Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had ordered the United Nations peacekeeping force out of the Sinai and quickly moved Egyptian troops into the areas that United Nations units had vacated. On 22 May, Nasser announced that the Gulf of Aqaba would, henceforth, be closed to Israeli shipping, effectively cutting off Israel's port at Eilat.

On the morning of 23 May, Johnson summoned Helms from a briefing of the House Armed

[redacted] interview, 15 November 1984; [redacted] interview, 16 November 1984.

¹⁵Helms Oral History, 4 April 1969, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.