

## Panel I:

# American Diplomacy on the Eve of War

by [Nicholas Rostow \(/experts/nicholas-rostow\)](#)

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



#### [Nicholas Rostow \(/experts/nicholas-rostow\)](#)

Nicholas Rostow is the Charles Evans Hughes Visiting Chair of Government and Jurisprudence at Colgate University, a former special assistant to Presidents Reagan and George H. W. Bush, and legal advisor to the U.S. mission at the United Nations.



#### Brief Analysis

On June 4, 2007, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy held a symposium marking the fortieth anniversary of the June 1967 war between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The purpose of the symposium was to grapple with the failure of U.S.-led diplomacy on the eve of the war, exploring the period from a variety of perspectives. The following is a summary of the symposium's first panel.

[View a summary \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=340\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=340) of the symposium, including video and audio of each session.

The symposium began with a lively discussion of American diplomatic efforts on the eve of the war. Ambassador Richard Parker, who served in the U.S. embassy in Cairo during the crisis, explained that American diplomats lacked sources close to Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser. The problem was exacerbated by the absence of a U.S. ambassador to Egypt in the crucial months before the war. As a result, American policymakers lacked a clear understanding of Nasser's political objectives and his strategy for achieving them.

Nicholas Rostow, whose father Eugene was a critical player in the State Department's efforts to manage the crisis and whose uncle Walt was national security advisor at the time, described the mix of factors that limited President Lyndon Johnson's effectiveness during the crisis. The deepening American involvement in Vietnam, Rostow said, limited Johnson's ability to win broad congressional support for leading an international fleet, known as the regatta, to break Egypt's blockade of the Straits of Tiran. Moreover, Rostow said that his father believed that the Pentagon shared little enthusiasm for the regatta project, because Department of Defense officials feared it would evolve into a military confrontation with Egypt. Rostow said his father speculated that Defense officials also believed that Israel could achieve a military victory on its own against Egypt -- not an unwelcome prospect at a time when American military resources were heavily invested elsewhere and when Nasser had often opposed U.S. interests in the region. ❖

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