

June 11, 1964

Letter from Peter Ramsbotham, British Embassy in Paris, to William 'Willie' Morris, Foreign Office

Citation:

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Summary:

This letter describes a meeting between Peter Ramsbotham, chief of the chancery at the British Embassy in France, and George Soutou, a senior official at the French Foreign Ministry. Soutou acknowledged that the French believed that the Israelis were attempting to "put themselves in a position to make a nuclear bomb if they wanted to." The French-Israeli agreement did not include a condition that prevented the use of non-French uranium for Dimona, and Ramsbotham wondered whether the French should be told about the Argentine-Israeli secret deal. Minutes of a conversation with Arkell of the Defense Intelligence Staff are attached.

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1964

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SECRET

ISRAEL

ER 1241/24. /G

FROM P. E. Ramsbotham PARIS - Mous

SUBJECT: Talk with Sauton of Quai d'Orsay on Israel Nuclear Activity

No. 1247/16/64 Dated June 11th Received June 19th

Encloses Copy of:

References and Relevant Papers: -119, -115(63), -159, -15, -133(63)

(Outward Action) By A.W. Redpath, C.R.O. 7/7 P. Joseph D. S. (Melopole) R/P 29/6.

MINUTES E.D.W. Copy with Redpath, C.R.O. P. Joseph D. S. (Melopole) dr.

S 4 is important in that it indicates that the French have a set means of pressure open to them which they are prepared to use. I therefore think that the Canadian information should certainly be passed to the French if authority can be obtained. I have spoken to Mr Atwell who will try to do so. He has also mentioned to me that the Americans have no confirmation of the Canadian report. If the French should deny the Israelis any further assistance it is questionable whether this would have more than a delaying effect on the Israelis. Mr de la Grandville told Mr Ramsbotham in February 1964 "the Israelis were far from being dependent on French assistance as they had acquired many excellent scientists" (Mr Ramsbotham's letter of February 29 at ER 1241/5). See also draft on -/224.

(Printing Instructions)


(Referred to Legal Adviser)

(Action completed) 7-7-64 (Main Indexed) 1/2/66

Handwritten initials and date 25/6

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W. Morris  *unclassified* 28
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SECRET AND GUARD

(1247/16/64)

RECEIVED IN
 ARCHIVES
 BRITISH EMBASSY,
 PARIS.
 15 JUN 1964
 June 11, 1964.

Dear Willie

ER1241/24/G

In your letter ER 1241 of April 27 about Israel's nuclear activities you suggested a number of points which we might put to the French were they to resume the dialogue on the subject with us. Subsequently Laurence wrote to Pedler (his letter VG 1023/4 of April 29) reporting a conversation he had had with Brojon of the French Embassy.

2. When I called on Soutou the other day for a tour d'horizon the conversation turned to Israel and I found him very ready to discuss the subject of Israel's nuclear activities. He started off by saying that the French agreed with us that it could prove disastrous if the Israelis were to develop a nuclear military potential since it would almost certainly stimulate the Egyptians into trying to acquire a similar capability for themselves. He said that French policy in this matter was extremely firm (meaning, no doubt, that the Elysée was now even more determined than before not to arouse Arab suspicions that France was assisting Israel to acquire a military nuclear capability).

3. Confirming what de la Grandville had previously told us (my letter of February 24), Soutou said that the French Government recognised that it was probably Israeli policy to attempt at least to put themselves in a position to make a nuclear bomb if they wanted to. He repeated that the French, for their part, were satisfied that the system of control now operating on the supply of French material and its return for re-processing and plutonium-recovery was meticulous. Everything was being checked and weighed to the last milligram.

4. Soutou then explained that the original Franco-Israeli agreement for nuclear co-operation had been rather loosely drafted and had not made it a condition that only French uranium should be used in the reactor supplied by the French - though this was clearly the spirit of the agreement. The French interpreted the agreement in this sense and had already prevented the sale of uranium to the Israelis from one of the ex-French African countries. Soutou added that, if the Israelis now succeeded in obtaining significant supplies of uranium from sources other than France (he mentioned South

/Africa,

W. Morris, Esq., C.M.G.,
 Foreign Office,
 London, S.W. 1.

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SECRET AND GUARD

-1159.
Africa, but not Argentina, and I naturally made no reference to it in view of the secrecy of the Canadian information mentioned in Goodison's letter of April 29 to Kellas), the French would tell them that they regarded this as a breach of the agreement and that they would consequently withdraw from it and deny the Israelis any further assistance.

5. As time was short I did not have the opportunity to put the points suggested in the enclosure to your letter under reference except to ask if the French knew whether or not there was a plutonium separation plant at Dimona. Soutou replied that the French did not believe that the Israelis had such a plant.

6. It is interesting to find the French still ready to talk to us about this delicate subject at a time when even Soutou is becoming much less frank in discussing African affairs. (There are special reasons for this). You may therefore think that it would be worth telling the Canadians about my conversation with Soutou and suggesting that, since the French seem to be sincerely in agreement with their Western partners in wishing to prevent the Israelis acquiring a military nuclear capability, the Canadians might like to consider talking to the French (or authorising us to do so) about the Argentine deal. I appreciate that the Canadians may not agree to this suggestion since they have so far treated their information as Guard, but it seems to me that if we really want the French to do what they can to prevent the Israelis breaking the spirit of the Franco-Israeli agreement we shall have to take them into our confidence when we hear of Israeli attempts at evasion.

7. I am sending copies of this letter to Kellas in Tel Aviv, Wright in Washington and Maitland in Cairo on a secret and guard basis. I enclose additional copies for Arkell in the Defence Intelligence Staff and Redpath in the Commonwealth Relations Office who received copies of Goodison's letter under reference.

Your ever Peter

(P.E. Ramsbotham)

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