

January 30, 1961

Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy, 'Your Appointment with Ogden R. Reid, Recently Ambassador to Israel'

Citation:

"Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy, 'Your Appointment with Ogden R. Reid, Recently Ambassador to Israel'", January 30, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, NARA, RG 59, Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Office of Near Eastern Affairs (NESA/NEA), Records of the Director, 1960-1963, Box 5, Tel Aviv - 1961. Originally published in Avner Cohen and William Burr, eds., National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book #547 (April 21, 2016).

<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/123810>

Summary:

Memorandum and briefing materials for President Kennedy on the discovery of the Israel Dimona nuclear reactor. Given in preparation for a meeting with Ogden Reid, who had just resigned as US ambassador to Israel.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

~~SECRET~~
THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

January 30, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Your Appointment with Ogden R. Reid,
Recently Ambassador to Israel

Mr. Reid, who has just resigned as American Ambassador to Israel, made a creditable record during his eighteen months tenure. He gained the friendship and respect of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Golda Meir. Both he and his charming wife made an excellent impression on the Israeli public by studying Hebrew and by friendly interest in many aspects of Israeli life. Mr. Reid has effectively represented our country, frequently securing Israeli cooperation in specified courses of action despite delicate and difficult obstacles. Items of current interest in our relations with Israel include:

1. Israel's Atomic Energy Activities. Since this is an item of special interest in our relations with Israel at this time, I am enclosing a separate memorandum on this subject.

2. Arab-Israel Relations. While progress toward an Arab-Israel settlement has not been achieved, there has been a diminution of border violence and other unfriendly manifestations between the two sides. Mr. Reid may be commended for his efforts during various incipient crises in persuading Ben-Gurion and his government to follow courses of moderation.

3. Israel's Economic Progress. We have continued our policies of helping Israel's economic growth with programs totalling for FY 1960 approximately \$62,500,000. This is slightly over the average United States Government aid extended to Israel over each of the twelve years since its birth. With such assistance as well as contributions from German reparations payments and generous donations from the Jewish groups in this country, Israel has registered remarkable economic progress. At present per capita gross national product is higher than that of several Western European countries.

4. Israel's Security. We agreed last spring to sell Israel important early warning radar equipment but have declined a request for an elaborate and costly ground-to-air missile system on the grounds that the IAF would undoubtedly seek similar weapons from the USSR with resultant introduction of a burdensome and dangerous missile era in the Near East. ICBM decision was consistent also with

Authority NND 959371

~~SECRET~~

- 2 -

our policy of recent years of not becoming a supplier of significant types or amounts of arms to nations of the Near East. Although posing somewhat of a financial burden, Israel has been able to procure most of its military supplies from France and other European sources.

A brief biographic sketch of Ambassador Reid is enclosed, along with the special memorandum concerning Israel's atomic energy activities.

[Handwritten signature]

John Bush

JAN 30 1961

6253 NS/E

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

1092

Subject: Israel's Atomic Energy Activities

In 1955 under the "Atoms-for-Peace" program the United States undertook to assist Israel with its atomic energy development program. Subsequently a one megawatt research reactor was built with our aid at Nahal Szein, near Tel Aviv.

In the summer and early fall of 1960 rumors reached our Embassy at Tel Aviv that the French were collaborating with the Israelis in the construction of a large reactor at Dimona, near Beerseba, in the northern part of the Negev desert.

FOIA(b)1

Secretary Rortor on December 9 called in Israeli Ambassador Harman who undertook to obtain full information from his government. After a number of exchanges, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion gave us categorical assurances supported by appropriate public statements to the effect that Israel does not have plans for developing nuclear weaponry. The French have also assured us that their assistance is promised on Israel's atomic energy program being solely for peaceful purposes. Ben-Gurion has indicated that aside from normal military precautions the reason for Israel's extreme secrecy with respect to the Dimona project was his fear and that of the foreign firms assisting the project that the Arab states would boycott or take other retaliatory measures against any firm or even country assisting the project. There is considerable justification for this Israeli reasoning.

State

Our government's concern was two-fold: a) pursuant to Congressional legislation and firm executive branch policy the United States is opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons capabilities; and b) Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons would have grave repercussions in the Middle East, not the least of which might be the probable stationing of Soviet nuclear weapons on the soil of Israel's embittered Arab neighbors.

The Israeli and French assurances which we have received appear to be satisfactory, although several minor questions still require clarification. In any case, the Department considers this not a single episode but a continuing subject and it is the intention of our intelligence agencies to maintain a continuing watch on Israel as on other countries to ensure that nuclear weapons capabilities are not being proliferated. At the moment, we are encouraging the Israelis to permit a qualified scientist from the United States or other friendly power to visit the Dimona installation. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion has indicated

~~SECRET~~

- 2 -

that this may be possible at an early date.

A full chronology of our interest in Israel's atomic energy activities is attached in the event that it may be of interest to you.

/S/ DEAN RUSK

Dean Rusk

S/S - RO

JAN 30 1961

A true copy of signed original

Enclosure:

Chronology of our interest in Israel's atomic energy activities.

REA:RE:ABMeyer:av
1/30/61

6253 NS/E

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

**MEMORANDUM OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO ITALY**

1092

Mr. Reid was born on June 24, 1907, in New York City. He attended Hamilton Academy and received an AB degree from Yale University in 1929. He served in the United States Army from 1933 to 1946 and is now a Captain in the United States Army Reserve.

Mr. Reid joined the staff of the **NEW YORK SUNSHINE** in 1930 and served successively as reporter and columnist (the Red Columnist). In 1932 he assumed an active role in the administration of the paper in the circulation, advertising, accounting and production departments. In May 1933 he became President and Managing Editor of the **NEW YORK SUNSHINE** and in April 1935 he was named President and Editor of the **NEW YORK SUNSHINE**. Mr. Reid retained actively on the Board of Directors until the newspaper was sold in 1938, but has since resigned. He was appointed Ambassador to Italy in March 1939 and presented his credentials to President Ben-Sol on July 2, 1939. Mr. Reid resigned effective January 20, 1941 and his future plans are not known to the Department.

Mr. Reid is married to the former Mary Louise Stewart and they have four children, Stuart, Michael, William Rogers, and Elizabeth, who was born in Italy earlier this year. Their home in the United States is at Purchase, New York.

**LISTING OF UNITED STATES INTEREST
IN ISRAELI ATOMIC ENERGY ACTIVITIES**

1092

- July 12, 1958 U.S.-Israel Atom-for-Peace Agreement
- May 2, 1958 U.S. agreed to assist one megawatt research reactor at Nehal Eshba.
- 1960
- June 14 Embassy Tel Aviv referred in a despatch to "rumors" that French were collaborating with Israelis in an atomic energy project near Beerseba.
- Summer To Embassy officer inquiries, Israelis said, "Textile Plant"
- August 2 Embassy Tel Aviv reported U.S. technician's "impression" that French-Israeli atomic energy project being built near Beerseba
- September To U.S. Service attaches' inquiries, Israelis said, "Metallurgical research installation".
- September 19 CIA referred to August 2 report, FOIA (b) 1 State
- October 19 State Department instructed field to provide more information.
- November 30 Embassy Tel Aviv reported confirmatory views of visiting Dr. Henry J. Gensberg of Phoenix Project, University of Michigan
- December 1 Philip Farley, Special Assistant for Atomic Energy at the State Department, debriefed Dr. Gensberg in Washington
FOIA (b) 1 State
- December 2 Assessment made by U.S. Joint Atomic Energy Inter-Agency Committee that a 200 megawatt reactor appeared under construction near Beerseba.
- December 3 Joint AEC Committee in Congress notified.
- December 4 Similar conclusion received from United Kingdom.

~~SECRET~~

- 2 -

December 4 Israel AEC official Bergson for first time confirms to Embassy Tel Aviv that a project is under construction, disallows proposed public statement.

December 6 Secretary Harter holds meeting re courses of action, proposed Israeli statement not considered consistent.

December 7 Subject discussed by Operations Coordinating Board

December 8 Yerley briefed Joint AEC Committee

December 8 National Intelligence Estimate 100-6-48 attacks gravity of potential repercussions.

December 8 Secretary Harter notified UK Ambassador that U.S. planned to ask Israelis about project, obtained permission to use UK photograph.

December 9 Secretary called in Ambassador Abraham Harman who undertook to inquire.

December 9 Secretary also expressed our concern to French Charge d'Affaires.

December 10 Secretary departed for NATO meetings in Paris.

December 13 Time magazine reported a "small power" was developing a nuclear capability

December 16 Tip-off story in London Daily Express

December 17 Harman expressed Department hope that AEC Chairman McCone would avoid comment in TV-cast

December 18 McCone on TV said U.S. had asked Israel for information

December 19 Washington Post carried extensive and fairly accurate story

December 19 Department issued statement saying Harman called in December 9

December 19 Secretary returned from Paris and conferred with President

~~SECRET~~

- 3 -

December 20

Harmen saw Secretary

- 1) Acknowledged 24 megawatt Dimona reactor for research
- 2) Said began one year ago, will require 3-4 years to complete
- 3) Assisted by France and in minor way several other countries
- 4) However, under direction of Israeli scientists
- 5) Insured that project was for peaceful uses only
- 6) When completed, would be open to students from friendly countries
- 7) Cost \$5,000,000 per year exclusive of local costs
- 8) Ben-Gurion would issue public statement following day
- 9) Secretary asked additional questions

December 21

Ben-Gurion made statement before Knesset

- 1) Referred to Nehal Rubin project
- 2) Acknowledged 24 megawatt reactor near Beersheva
- 3) Said it dedicated to scientific research for Negev
- 4) Completion in 3-4 years
- 5) Under Israeli direction, will be open to friendly students
- 6) "Intended exclusively for peaceful purposes"
- 7) Anticipated future power reactor

December 21

Harmen saw Assistant Secretary Jones and Farley

- 1) Presented Ben-Gurion's statement
- 2) Explained belated response due to Secretary's absence
- 3) Complained about widespread publicity
- 4) Hoped assurances would preclude "nagging doubt"
- 5) Was told full factual information best answer

December 22

Department's Press Statement

- 1) Noted Harmen's call and Ben-Gurion's statement
- 2) Welcomed statements, saw second reactor as no sense for special concern
- 3) Restated U.S. Government's continuing watchfulness against proliferation

December 22

Department sent background guidance to field posts

December 24

Ambassador Gold saw Ben-Gurion, suggested safeguards

December 24

Ambassador Harmen returned to Israel for consultations

~~SECRET~~

- 4 -

December 31 Ambassador Reid instructed re specific remaining questions
a) Pintonius, b) Visits, c) IAEA safeguards, d) 3rd
reactor, e) no weapons

1961

January 4 Ambassador Reid held extensive discussion with Ben-Gurion
a. Pintonius would go to uranium supplier
b. Visits by nationals from friendly powers would be
permitted
c. No IAEA safeguards until others agree; "no Americans".
d. No third reactor now contemplated
e. Categorical assurance that no nuclear weapons planned
Foreign Relations Committee

January 6 Senate asked Secretary for more information re Israeli
reactor

January 9 Jones and Farley reported to Senate Foreign Relations
subcommittee

January 9 French confirm categorically that their assistance to
Israelis is premised entirely on Israel's program being
solely for peaceful purposes

January 11 Ambassador Korman returned from Israel, reported as above
to Secretary

January 17 Department instructed Embassy Tel Aviv to keep pressing
for early visit to Dimona installations by scientist from
a "friendly power"