

March 28, 1961
Department of State Memorandum of Conversation,
'Dimona Reactor'

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Summary:

Assistant Secretary Lewis Jones asks again about arranging a US visit to the Dimona nuclear facility.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: March 28, 1961

SUBJECT: Dimona Reactor

PARTICIPANTS: His Excellency Avraham Harman, Ambassador of Israel
G. Lewis Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for NEA

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I asked Ambassador Harman to call today and said that I wished to point out to him that we had been waiting since January 4 for the invitation to send people to Israel to see the Dimona reactor. I said that I had faithfully reported to my superiors his explanation that Mr. Ben Gurion and others involved in the Israel Government are in the throes of a political crisis (still unresolved) and that it was difficult in these circumstances to get them to direct their attention to other matters such as the visit to Dimona. I said, however, that Mr. Theodore Kollek (see memorandum of conversation dated February 26, 1961) had indicated to me that the invitation would be forthcoming "during the month of March" irrespective of the political difficulties. We are now close to the end of March.

I told Harman that on the United States side interest in the quiet visit remained keen. The President himself had asked on March 27 when the visit would take place and had asked for a report from the Department by March 31. I told Harman that as a friend of Israel I was anxious to see the shadow of doubt regarding Dimona removed; it was bad for Israel if the impression got abroad that Mr. Ben Gurion was "stalling" regarding the invitation. I urged Harman to take up the matter again in the light of our talk and telephone me at once as soon as he had news.

Harman (who I believe is as anxious as we are to have the visit take place) replied that he had no news. The political crisis in Israel was still

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unresolved and went very deep. In United States terms it was as though a coalition of Democrats and Republicans were considering setting up a new political group. Harman said that he had been pushing his government as much as he dared but in Israeli eyes, particularly the eyes of Ben Gurion, it was difficult to say why "there was such a hurry": the visit had been promised, the visit would take place.

I reiterated that as a friend of Israel I considered it important for there to be no further delays and inquired regarding the possibility of his obtaining a favorable reply during the next few days. Harman said he was very doubtful that anything could be done or that any action could take place until after Passover week which starts April 3 and runs until April 10. During this period all government departments are on half time. He would, of course, telegraph at once but he thought it would be unrealistic to believe that there could be a reply before April 10.

Harman reminded me that the Haaretz correspondent had heard that a "quiet" U. S. visit was to take place (see memorandum to The Secretary dated March 7, 1961). He said that this correspondent had more recently gotten the same story from U. S. sources: it had taken Harman two hours with the correspondent to "rebury" the story.

COMMENT: When the "quiet" visit takes place we owe it to the Israelis not to make any announcement regarding either officially or through "leaks".

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