



March 30, 1961

**Memorandum from Secretary Rusk to President
Kennedy, 'Dimona Reactor in Israel'**

Citation:

"Memorandum from Secretary Rusk to President Kennedy, 'Dimona Reactor in Israel'", March 30, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RG 59, DF, 611.84A45/3-3061. 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/123822>

Summary:

Rusk updates the President on US requests to Israel to visit the Dimona reactor, and provides a related chronology.

Credits:

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

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

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Number 7 of 13 copies, Series A

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Dimona Reactor in Israel

On March 27 you inquired regarding the status of the promised invitation for American experts to visit quietly the Israeli nuclear reactor at Dimona. Deputy Under Secretary Roger Jones promised to provide you with a reply. This invitation was first promised to us by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion on January 4 through Ambassador Reid.

The enclosed chronology regarding the Dimona reactor shows that the Department has been reminding the Israel Government at approximately weekly intervals through Ambassador Harman of the importance of an early "quiet" visit by Americans to Dimona.

Following your telephone call, Assistant Secretary Lewis Jones called in Ambassador Harman and again told him that we are anxiously waiting the Israeli invitation (see memorandum of conversation enclosed). On this occasion Harman, who personally shares our belief that the visit should take place soon, reiterated the difficulties occasioned by the internal political crisis in Israel. He said, and our embassy at Tel Aviv confirms, that the Israeli leaders are profoundly preoccupied by their internal political problems. This is particularly true of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, who is personally in charge of Israel's atomic energy program.

When Jones urged Harman to make a new effort to hasten the invitation, Harman said he would do so but that in any case it was unlikely that any decision could be taken in Israel during the next few days. Between April 3 and April 10 is Passover Week, when little work is done in Israel.

The Department believes that Harman is probably right regarding the unlikelihood of the Israelis issuing an invitation prior to April 10, although our latest demarche to Harman using your name is likely to be helpful to this end.

We believe that Ben-Gurion fully intends to issue the invitation. Part of his difficulty is (a) that, having given his word, he does not like to be pushed by the United States, and (b) he is personally in the greatest internal political difficulty of his career. He probably

feels

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feels that his problems may be compounded if his enemies have some-
thing new to pin on him arising out of his handling of the Dixons
reactor affair. It is for the latter reason that when the visit
takes place it should be a quiet one regarding which there should
be no United States publicity.

/s/ Chester Bowles

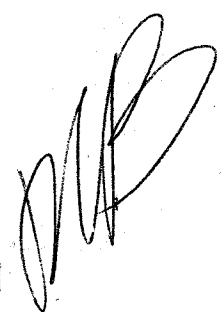
Acting Secretary

Enclosures:

1. Chronology.
2. Copy of Memorandum
of Conversation.

S/S - RO

MAR 30 1961



True copy of signed original

NEA:GL Jones:ebb
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HISTORY OF UNITED STATES INTEREST
IN ISRAEL'S ATOMIC ENERGY ACTIVITIES

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July 12, 1955 U.S.-Israel Atom-for-Peace Agreement signed.

May 2, 1958 U.S. agreed to assist one megawatt research reactor at Nahal Rubin, near Tel Aviv.

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June 14 Embassy Tel Aviv referred in a despatch to "rumors" that French were collaborating with Israelis in an atomic energy project near BeerSheva.

Summer To Embassy officer inquiries, Israelis said, "Textile Plant".

August 2 Embassy Tel Aviv reported U.S. technicians impression" that French-Israeli atomic energy project being built near BeerSheva.

September To U.S. Services Attaches' inquiries, Israelis said, "Metallurgical research installation".

September 19 CIA referred to August 2 report, noted no confirming information, requested field obtain answers to specific questions.

October 19 State Department instructed field to provide more information.

November 30 Embassy Tel Aviv reported confirmatory views of visiting Dr. Henry J. Gombert of Phoenix Project, University of Michigan.

December 1 Philip Farley, Special Assistant for Atomic Energy at the State Department, debriefed Dr. Gombert in Washington.

Meanwhile UK also became concerned, made telescopic photograph available to U.S. intelligence agencies.

December 2 Assessment made by U.S. Joint Atomic Energy Inter-Agency Committee that a 200 megawatt reactor appeared under construction near BeerSheva.

December 3 Joint AEC Committee in Congress notified.

December 4 Similar conclusion received from United Kingdom.

December 4 Israel AEC official Bergman for first time confirmed to Embassy Tel Aviv that a project is under construction, disclosed proposed public statement.

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

December 7 Subject discussed by Operations Coordinating Board.

December 8 Farley briefed Joint AEC Committee.

December 8 National Intelligence Estimate 100-8-50 attested 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 to the Department the hope that AEC Chairman McCone would avoid comment in his upcoming 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 on U.S. actions with respect to Israel's atomic energy activities.

December 19 Secretary returned from Paris and conferred with President.

December 19 Department issued statement saying Harman called in December 9.

December 20 Harman saw Secretary.

- 1) Acknowledged 24 megawatt Dimona reactor for research
- 2) Said begun 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) Assured 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

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- 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 Masov
 - 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 Harman 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 Harman's call and Ben-Gurion's statement
 - 2) Welcomed statements, saw second reactor as no cause 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 Reid saw Ben-Gurion, suggested safeguards.
- December 24 Ambassador Harman returned to Israel for consultations.
- December 31 Ambassador Reid was instructed re specific remaining questions.
- a) Plutonium, b) Visits, c) IAEA safeguards, d) 3rd reactor,
 - e) no weapons

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- January 4 Ambassador Reid held extensive discussion with Ben-Gurion.
- a. Plutonium would go to uranium supplier
 - b. Visits by nationals from friendly powers would be permitted
 - c. No IAEA safeguards until others agree; "no Russians".
 - d. No third reactor now contemplated
 - e. Categorical assurance that no nuclear weapons planned
- January 6 Senate Foreign Relations Committee asked Secretary for more information re Israeli reactor.

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- January 9 French Government confirmed categorically that its assistance to Israel is predicated on Israel's program being solely for peaceful purposes.
- January 10 UK received reply to questionnaire it had submitted to Israel on Dimona reactor. Reply paralleled earlier comments to US.
- January 11 Ambassador Harman returned from Israel, reported to the Secretary the assurances made by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion to Ambassador Reid.
- January 17 Department instructed Embassy Tel Aviv to keep pressing for early visit to Dimona installation by scientists from a "friendly power".
- January 21 In conversation with Ambassador Reinhardt in Cairo, President Nasser said that development of nuclear capability in Israel would compel UAR take radical action.
- January 30 Briefing memorandum on Israel atomic energy programs submitted to President Kennedy.
- February 3 Assistant Secretary Jones "nudged" Ambassador Harman informally on desirability of definite date being fixed for visit to Dimona.
- February 7 During initial courtesy call on Secretary, UAR Ambassador Kamel expressed concern on Israeli reactor. Secretary said we had received assurances from both Israel and France that reactor was for peaceful purposes, not weapons production. Added we intend to maintain vigilance.
- February 13 Secretary Rusk asked Ambassador Harman, during latter's initial courtesy call, whether further word about visit to reactor had been received. Secretary intimated Israel's complete candor in this field would be of great importance to future relationships. Ambassador Harman said Prime Minister Ben-Gurion well aware of U.S. interest, favored visit from representatives of a friendly power, and intended give attention to this matter as soon as Israel cabinet crisis permitted.
- February 26 Kollek, Director of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's office, on visit to U.S. informed Assistant Secretary Jones he saw no reason why unpublicized visit to Dimona by U.S. expert should not take place "during the month of March".
- March 3 President Kennedy informed of Kollek-Jones conversation and S/AE efforts locate qualified U.S. observer to visit Dimona.
- March 6 Assistant Secretary Jones again commented to Harman on desirability of Israel's naming specific date for visit by U.S. expert. Harman cited Israel's cabinet crisis as complicating factor, but replied he hoped receive instructions issue invitation in ten days or so.
- March 13 Assistant Secretary Jones again "nudged" Ambassador Harman re the projected visit to Dimona.

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- March 22 Assistant Secretary Jones again "nudged" Harman by telephone saying that he was to appear before the Near East Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on March 29 and felt it probable he would be asked about the Israel reactor.
- March 28 Assistant Secretary Jones asked Ambassador Harman to call and pointed out that USG had been waiting since January 4 for the promised invitation to send experts to Israel to see the Dimona reactor. USG interest remained keen. The White House had inquired on March 27 when the visit would take place and had requested a report from the Department by March 31. Harman said he had been pushing his Government hard. Promised he would cable, but doubted any action until after Passover Week April 3-10.