

May 18, 1961

**Memorandum, by L.D. Battle, Executive Secretary,
to McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the
President for National Security Affairs, 'American
Scientists' Visit to Israel's Dimona Reactor'**

Citation:

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Summary:

President Kennedy told the new US ambassador to Israel, Walworth Barbour, that he was concerned about Israel's insistence on a secret visit as well as the "absence of a 'neutral' scientist" in the visit to Dimona. The State Department took the position that it was better to put up with Ben-Gurion's "sensitivities" about secrecy than "have no visit" at all

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. ROBERTSON
THE WHITE HOUSE

Recategorized as
Category "A"

September 30, 1966

/s/ Warren A. Henderson

Subject: American Scientists' Visit
to Israel's Dimona Reactor

During a brief conversation with Ambassador-designate Melworth
Barbour on May 16 the President expressed interest in two aspects of
the forthcoming secret visit of two American scientists to the Dimona
reactor in Israel: (1) our agreement that the visit should be carried
out without publicity, and (2) the absence of a "neutral" scientist.

The two problems raised by the President are, of course, related.
We have long believed and repeatedly stressed to the Israelis that it
is in their interest to allay world fears by permitting objective,
international inspection of the Dimona reactor or normal access by
scientists. In response to our approaches, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion
replied, in effect, that Israel's national pride will not permit it
to be singled out from all other nations; and unless and until other
nations agree to international inspection and control, Israel is not
prepared to submit to such inspection. Ben-Gurion made it clear that
if a visit to the reactor were to take place at this stage, it would
have to be carried out by Americans and without publicity.

Rather than have no visit, we considered that we should respect
Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's sensitivities. We did not agree that
complete and continual secrecy as to the results of the visit would
be possible. We pointed out that appropriate U.S. Government agencies
and perhaps certain friendly governments might in due course have to
be told. We hope that once our own initial evaluation has taken place
it may prove easier to persuade Israel to accept visits by scientists
of other countries or publicized, international inspection by the IAEA
or some other group containing neutral representatives. Failing this,
it would still be possible to convey to Arab leaders our conviction
regarding the peaceful nature of Israel's atomic research program if,
in fact, the current visit and future inspections confirm Israel's
earlier public statements.

Ambassador-designate Barbour thought the President would be
interested in the above background.

/s/ Melvin L. Mantell

L.B. Battle

Executive Secretary

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A true copy of signed original.

NEA:MS:RCranford:nkf 5/17/61 [redacted] S/AE - Mr. Farley (draft)

We request this subject
be covered in briefing
book for President's
meeting with Ben-
Gurion - per B.
Smith 5/22/61

NEA - Mr. Russell
informed 5/23/61

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