

**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:**

"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'", May 18, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RG 59, DF, 884A.1901/5-1861. Originally published in Avner Cohen and William Burr, eds., National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book #547 (April 21, 2016).  
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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

**Credits:**

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

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Original Scan

DECLA

Authority NND 949569

F790010-1952

This document consists of 1 Page, No. 5 of 10 copies, Series A.

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MAY 18 1961

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 Harbour 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 Harbour thought the President would be interested in the above background.

/s/ Melvin L. Mantell

L.B. Battle

Executive Secretary

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NND 422477  
STATE 3-18-15

MAY 18 1961

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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884 A. 1901/5-1861

STATE DEPT. DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW  
Change/classify to \_\_\_\_\_  
with concurrence of \_\_\_\_\_  
after \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: JUL 18 2000  
EO 12958, 25X  
IPS/CR/TR by [signature]

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