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ISRAEL PRIME MINISTER BEN-GURION'S VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES

MAY 1961

SPECIAL ASSISTANT
TO THE SECRETARY
S/AE
MAY 2 1961
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Your Meeting with Israel
Prime Minister Ben-Gurion

Ben-Gurion's Purpose: The Israelis have indicated that in his talk with you in New York on May 30 Prime Minister Ben-Gurion will concentrate on two subjects:

a. Israel's Security Problem: With reference to Israel's security, Mr. Ben-Gurion will no doubt stress that the Arab military threat is increasingly serious and that Israel is highly vulnerable to a surprise air attack. He will probably urge some sort of security declaration from us, as well as substantial military aid, particularly the supply of ground-to-air missiles (Hawks).

b. Israel's Atomic Energy Activities: Mr. Ben-Gurion this past December and January assured us that Israel's new reactor at Dimona is to be utilized solely for peaceful purposes. It is not inconceivable that in his talk with you he will contend that the growing Arab threat leaves Israel with no alternative but to develop a nuclear military capability, primarily for deterrent purposes.

The Arab Factor: As you know, we have been somewhat concerned about Arab repercussions to Ben-Gurion's visit here. There has been a recent Arab tendency to view the new U S Administration as partial to Israel. The furthering of this suspicion would inevitably Arab ill-will, thus handicapping any efforts we might wish to undertake to assist in resolving Arab-Israel differences and also having wider implications such as rendering more difficult Ambassador Stevenson's task in securing favorable votes at the United Nations on issues vital to our national interest. Fortunately, your recent talk with UAR Ambassador Kamel and the recent letters which you dispatched to Arab leaders have had favorable effects, including the cushioning of Arab reactions to Mr. Ben-Gurion's visit.

Our Purpose: In our view, the Ben-Gurion visit affords an opportunity to advance our purposes in the Middle East. Specifically, we would hope that through your influence Mr. Ben-Gurion can be impressed with the realization that the answer to Israel's future lies not in some sort of Fortress Israel concept but in Israel initiatives and cooperation in moves designed ultimately to make Israel an accepted member in the Middle East family of nations. If we are to hope to break the ever more dangerous Arab-Israel impasse, and if we are to regain some degree of Arab confidence in us, there must be a significant unilateral concession by Israel.

Arab Refugee Approach: We would hope especially that you can persuade Mr. Ben-Gurion to cooperate in the approach which is being undertaken by the Palestine Conciliation Commission with a view toward making progress on the Arab refugee problem. Such progress is important and logical for many

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reasons, not the least of which is that it might well prove to be the key to the ultimate Arab-Israel modus vivendi we all seek.

Talking Outline: With the foregoing in mind we are proposing in the accompanying briefing materials a "Talking Outline" which suggests you emphasize to Mr. Ben-Gurion: (a) the uniquely close ties which bind our two countries together and which should be a source of assurance to Israel; (b) the need for progress on the refugee question and specifically the need for a significant gesture by Israel on the key element of repatriation; and (c) our firm opposition to Israel's developing a nuclear military capability, both because of global and Middle East considerations. Since Mr. Ben-Gurion has a tendency to speak at length before allowing interruption (last year he spoke over an hour before President Eisenhower could speak), you may wish to make the three points in the "Talking Outline" at the start of your meeting with the Prime Minister.

Contingency Subjects: We are, of course, aware of Israel's legitimate defense needs. Our position on this matter is set forth in the first of a number of contingency papers which are included in the briefing material.

Dean Rusk

Enclosure:

Briefing Book.

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ISRAEL'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Discussion

The United States is in a particularly vulnerable position vis-a-vis Israel's nuclear program. It is the one power which could exert sufficient pressure to assure that Israel's program is not directed to military uses, yet, willy-willy, it finds itself the guarantor of Israel's peaceful intent. Moreover, Israel will look to the United States for political and financial support of the program, regardless of the manner in which it develops. The U.S. has the findings of Drs. Croach and Staebler, who visited the reactor, but this covers only present activities. Certain knowledge of the program's purpose can only be obtained by similar visits at frequent intervals. Any protracted exclusion of foreign visitors could imply one of two almost equally objectionable Israel decisions; (a) to embark on production of fissionable material for weapons manufacture; or (b) to give the appearance of having decided to do so in order to intimidate its Arab neighbors. The first is unacceptable by reason of our opposition to the proliferation of atomic weapons, and the second because it might set off violence resulting from an Arab mood of desperation.

The Israelis should be in no doubt as to the importance with which the U.S. regards this development. There should be continued access for Free World scientists, preferably from an increasing number of countries. The U.S. should oppose concealment of Israel's intentions, even if these be peaceful, because of the unsettling effect any doubt would have on an area with a highly explosive potential in the best of circumstances.

Considering Israel's extreme dependence on foreign contributions, nuclear development seems a field of endeavor which is might well have left to larger powers. Even they find the cost burdensome, and the United States is no exception. While Israel may plead its reliance on technological development to improve the lot of its people who are confined to an area singularly poor in natural resources, there has been no disposition on the part of her friends to deny her the fruits of their research.

Israel argues its exposed position militarily and its precarious economic situation as justification. To fulfill its raison d'etre-- e.g., provide a secure homeland for Jews who desire political freedom of their own making, Israel argues it must compensate for the deficiencies of a sterile land. Nuclear research will train a cadre of scientists and technicians who will be able to exploit for the common good any breakthrough permitting production of atomic energy on an economic basis.

Israel may suggest it will not attempt weapons production, but is not prepared to put itself at a disadvantage with the Arabs by publicly forswearing this possibility. Nor will it wish to throw the reactor site open to international inspection asserting that no matter how innocent the reactor's purpose, it can be made the subject of controversy and public speculation by any visiting delegation bent on embarrassing Israel or inflaming area tensions.

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Israel may suggest it is unable to mount an atomic program on its own financial resources without curtailment of other projects equally important to its pursuit of economic viability, and ask the United States to contribute materials and equipment in return for Israel's assurances that the fruits of the program will be devoted to the common good.

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ISRAEL'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Drafted.....NEA/NE:William L. Hamilton

Clearance.....NEA:Armin H. Meyer
S/AE:Philip J. Far

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