

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

August 1, 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Israel's Nuclear Program

As authorized by you, I called in Israeli Ambassador Rabin July 29 to carry out the first step in our scenario for discussions with the Israelis on their nuclear program. A full record of that meeting is enclosed.

To set the stage, I recalled that in Ambassador Rabin's talks with Assistant Secretary of Defense Warnke last November there had been a discussion of what Israel means when it says it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East. In this connection I noted that there had been no meeting of the minds between us on the interpretation of "introduce". We would like Israel to accept our interpretation, which is that non-introduction means non-possession. Were Israel to possess nuclear weapons, we would see this as a direct threat to the national security of the United States since it would add a new dimension of danger to the risk of a US-Soviet confrontation.

I also made the point that there is some forward movement on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and we feel it necessary to emphasize our concern over Israel's delay in signing. Noting that Prime Minister Eshkol had told us last December Israel was studying

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the implications of NPT signature, I said Israel's failure to sign would be a setback to our efforts to halt the spread of nuclear weapons worldwide.

Finally, I noted our concern that Israel was acquiring strategic missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, a development which the world would see as weakening Israel's assurances in the nuclear field.

I put to Ambassador Rabin our specific requests for (a) a report on the results of the Israeli government's study of the NPT question, (b) an assurance that when Israel said it would not introduce nuclear weapons it meant it would not possess such weapons, and (c) an assurance that Israel would not produce or deploy the Jericho strategic missile. In doing so, I carefully avoided making any explicit link between Israel's response and our supply of conventional weapons to Israel.

We had informed Ambassador Rabin in advance that I wanted to discuss the nuclear question with him but had not indicated the nature of what I would say. Predictably, the Ambassador was not prepared to go beyond earlier Israeli positions. On instructions from his Government, which he had apparently sought before our meeting, he stated that Israel's study of the NPT question was continuing and that he was not authorized to comment before that study was completed. With respect to nuclear weapons, he said he could only repeat that Israel would not be the first Middle Eastern state to introduce them. He did not comment on the missiles question. He undertook, however, to convey our approach on all points to his government.

If we have not had a reply to our approach in about one week's time, I believe we should underline the seriousness with which we view this matter by reminding the Ambassador that we are awaiting an early response.



Acting Secretary

Enclosure:

Memorandum of Conversation

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

*Memorandum of Conversation*

DATE: July 29, 1969

SUBJECT: Israel's Nuclear Weapon and Strategic Missile Policy

PARTICIPANTS: Lieutenant General Yitzhak RABIN, Ambassador of Israel  
Shlomo ARGOV, Minister, Embassy of Israel  
Moshe RAVIV, Counselor, Embassy of Israel


Elliot L. RICHARDSON, The Acting Secretary  
David PACKARD, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Alfred L. ATHERTON, Jr., Country Director, Israel  
and Arab-Israel Affairs

Mr. Richardson said he was aware of Ambassador Rabin's discussions last year with Assistant Secretary of Defense Warnke relating to the introduction of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. In light of subsequent progress toward ratification of the NPT, we believed it useful to review the status of this question as it was left in the exchange of letters between Rabin and Warnke of November 22 and November 27, respectively, of last year, which had brought out differing US and Israeli interpretations of what was meant by "introduce" nuclear weapons.

Rabin observed there were two problems: (a) nuclear weapons in the Middle East and (b) the NPT. Warnke had not discussed the NPT. Which, he asked, was the subject of today's talk?

Mr. Richardson said we saw the two problems as inseparable. The NPT question had moved forward since that time and we thought both questions should be reviewed together. Mr. Richardson then read the following oral statement:

"We want to discuss today a subject of deep concern to the United States -- the possibility that nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons delivery systems will be introduced into the Middle East.

  
NEA/IAI:ALATHERTON, Jr:slb  
(Drafting Office and Officer)

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"This would be a development the United States would regard not only as a tragedy for the Middle East but as a direct threat to United States national security. Our efforts to halt the spread of nuclear weapons worldwide would be dealt a severe blow and the possible risk of US-Soviet confrontation would be enhanced.

"For these reasons, Israel's nuclear policy is a subject of great importance to us. It transcends considerations of purely bilateral significance to our two nations.

"We are aware of Israel's assurances -- made publicly at the highest level of its government as well as to us privately -- that Israel will not be the first area state to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. We attach great weight to these assurances. But with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in existence, unilateral assurances are no longer sufficient in themselves to give the world confidence that Israel does not intend to manufacture nuclear weapons.

"We are particularly troubled by Israel's continued delay in signing the NPT because of Israel's potential for nuclear weapons production. Israel is not just another state that for one reason or another is delaying its adherence to the Treaty. The world knows that unlike most other states Israel has the technical capability to build nuclear weapons. It knows that Israel has a 26 megawatt nuclear reactor capable of producing fissionable material in sufficient quantity to build bombs. It is also becoming aware that Israel has had developed and is acquiring surface-to-surface missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

"Because of this proximity to the nuclear weapons threshold, Israel's attitude toward the NPT is being closely watched by other small and medium-sized states who are waiting to see whether nuclear weapons non-proliferation can be made to prevail as a global principle.

"We therefore attach utmost importance to Israel's early signature and ratification of the NPT. Last December, Prime Minister Eshkol wrote to President Johnson that Israel was studying the implications of Israel's adherence to the NPT. We would welcome the Ambassador's comments concerning the conclusions the Government of Israel has reached.

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"Upon reviewing the Ambassador's conversations with Assistant Secretary Warnke last November, we were struck by the evident difference between our two governments over what constitutes "introduction" of nuclear weapons. The Ambassador expressed the view, as we understand it, that a state could possess a nuclear explosive device but so long as that device was "unadvertised" and "untested" it could not be considered as having been "introduced".

"The U.S. Government cannot accept this interpretation of "introduction", as was made clear in Secretary Warnke's letter to the Ambassador concerning the F-4 sale. We would like to have Israel's assurance that when it says it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the area it means that it will not possess nuclear weapons.

"Israel has had developed and tested in France the so-called MD-620 or "Jericho" strategic missile which is capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. Some of the missiles remaining after tests are already in Israel.

"We are disturbed at Israel's acquisition of this missile because it makes sense to us only as a nuclear weapons carrier. We recognize that Israel claims that it can be used with other warheads; this is not, however, the way the world will see it. Whatever assurances Israel extends with respect to nuclear weapons will be seriously weakened by deployment of strategic nuclear-capable missiles.

"For this reason, we hope Israel will agree not to produce or deploy the Jericho missile. There is no sign of an active SSM program in any Arab country and no sign of Soviet interest in providing any of their Arab friends with assistance in either this or the nuclear weapons field."

Mr. Richardson summarized by noting we were asking (a) for the Ambassador's comments on the results of the GOI's study of the NPT question, (b) for an assurance that "non-introduction" means "non-possession" of nuclear weapons and (c) for assurances about the production and deployment of the Jericho missile.

Concerning the NPT, Ambassador Rabin said he could only repeat what Prime Minister Eshkol had said in his December 4, 1968

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letter to President Johnson -- namely that Israel was studying the question of NPT signature. There had been no change in this respect in GOI policy. Rabin said the NPT had many aspects not directly related to the real problems of the Middle East. He had received instructions the previous day to the effect that Israel had not concluded its study and he is not authorized to comment before that study is completed. Deputy Secretary Packard asked if he could estimate when that would be. Rabin noted that there had been a Cabinet change in Israel and that the Government faced other issues which were more pressing and more immediate.

On the question of introducing nuclear weapons, Rabin said parenthetically he interpreted this as meaning introduction by Middle Eastern states, not by major powers which have them there already. First, Rabin continued, he wanted to clarify his November conversation with Warnke. When Warnke asked for an interpretation of "introduce" he (Rabin) had said he was not clear about the question and could not answer officially but would appreciate hearing the US interpretation from Warnke. Emphasizing that he personally had no knowledge of nuclear weapons, he had asked Warnke two questions: (a) Would Warnke consider an untested nuclear weapon to be an effective weapon? This would not be so in the case of conventional weapons. (b) Would Warnke consider a weapon, which had not been advertised and proven, to be a weapon that could be used? In asking these questions Rabin said he was seeking to learn the US interpretation; he was not representing the Israeli position. On the basic question of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, he could now only repeat his government's position that it would not be the first state in the Middle East to introduce such weapons.

Commenting on the Acting Secretary's oral statement, Rabin said he wanted to make clear that he was not accepting the US assumption that Israel has the capability to build nuclear weapons. He could say neither that Israel was capable nor that it was not. He wanted to note, however, that the US has arrangements with Israel of a kind that do not even exist between the US and its allies, and which demonstrate the extent to which Israel has given us the opportunity to have a close look at what Israel is doing in the nuclear field.

Mr. Richardson said that our purpose in raising the interpretation of the word "introduce" was not to reopen the Warnke-Rabin

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discussion but to note that the question had been left last November with no meeting of minds. This had been made specific when Warnke had agreed to amend the last line of his November 27 letter to Rabin to avoid any implication that Israel accepted the US interpretation. We now want to move beyond that point and are seeking Israel's concurrence in our interpretation. As stated in Warnke's letter, that interpretation is that "The physical possession and control of nuclear arms by a Middle Eastern power would be deemed to constitute the introduction of nuclear weapons." Concerning the NPT we are anxious to learn more about Israel's position. The risks inherent in nuclear proliferation bring the NPT into the foreground at this stage, given the movement toward signature and ratification. We are discussing the matter with the Soviets, Japanese and Germans, hence the timeliness of raising it with Israel also.

Rabin commented that following the President's European trip, Mr. Nixon had said the US would not twist any arms about signing the NPT, and understood the difficulties inherent in asking the West Germans to sign just before their elections. Mr. Richardson said he would not want to engage in a semantic discussion. We have been discussing the matter with the Germans and think we have reasonable assurances that they will sign after their elections. We also think the Japanese will sign. Rabin replied that he was not saying that Israel would not sign but he could not say it would.

Rabin noted that there had been a recent US visit to Dimona and that everything seemed to be working as agreed. The Acting Secretary said he would not wish to record any complaints about the Dimona visit in this conversation. Nevertheless, Dimona visits do not obviate our concern about nuclear weapons, missiles and the NPT. In this connection there were additional considerations to those he had already mentioned: (a) on the proliferation problem, Israel's position was pivotal for other countries; (b) in terms of US national interests, serious consequences were foreseeable if Israel introduced nuclear weapons. Specifically, the Soviets would feel compelled to come to the assistance of the Arabs in some way since the Arabs do not have a nuclear capability. Rabin repeated that Israel had given us assurances about its nuclear intentions. Mr. Richardson replied that, speaking bluntly, those assurances had been hedged. If "non-introduction" means only that the weapons will not be tested and advertised, we are on the brink of a serious situation. If "introduction" is defined in the

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narrowest possible sense, meaning that all but minimal final steps will have been taken, then the situation is dangerous and potentially destabilizing. We see risks of a US-Soviet confrontation in the existing Middle East situation. Those risks would be increased radically if nuclear weapons were introduced; hence we feel compelled to raise this subject. Stating that he understood the Ambassador would need to consult his government, the Acting Secretary said he wanted to underscore the seriousness with which we view this matter. We would like to go beyond the point reached in the Rabin-Warnke talks.

Rabin concluded that, although the Israeli position is already well known, he would of course convey Mr. Richardson's comments to Jerusalem.

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