

INCOMING TELEGRAM *Department of State*

Israel

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Action

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Info

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Rec'd: MARCH 23, 1964
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FROM: TEL AVIV

ACTION: SECSTATE 976 PRIORITY

DATE: MARCH 23, 8 PM.

REF: DEPTTEL 810, EMBTEL 968, DEPTTEL 819

LIMDIS

AMBASSADOR BARBOUR HAD HOUR-LONG TALK MORNING MARCH 23 WITH PRIMIN ESHKOL ON OUR DIFFERENCES ABOUT REASSURING NASSER RE DIMONA. PRESENT WERE DIR GEN YAHIL, ARAD OF US DEPT, PRIMIN'S AIDE LUBRANI AND EMBOFF. AS AMBASSADOR PROCEEDED TO BEIRUT VIA OLD CITY TO MEET ASSISTANT SECRETARY TALBOT, FOLLOWING IS UNCLEAR REPORT.

WHILE PRIMIN WAS READING PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S LETTER, HE VOICED SEVERAL PRELIMINARY REACTIONS. PRIMARILY, HE TOOK IMMEDIATE ISSUE WITH STATEMENT THAT NASSER HAS NOT MISUSED US ASSURANCES. ESHKOL SAID NASSER HAS "ONLY" STARTED TO BUILD MISSILES, PRODUCED CHEMICAL WEAPONS, AND IS BUILDING A LARGE FACTORY FOR JETS; THESE WERE NASSER'S CONCLUSIONS. AMBASSADOR EXPLAINED THIS POINT IN LETTER SIMPLY WAS THAT NASSER HAD NOT PUBLICIZED PREVIOUS ASSURANCES.

ESHKOL, STRESSING HIS REMARKS TODAY DID NOT REPRESENT HIS DEFINITIVE RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT'S LATEST LETTER, ASKED IF PAST REASSURANCES ON DIMONA HAD REALLY RELIEVED TENSIONS. WHAT SIGNS ARE THERE THAT THIS WAS SO? PRIMIN CHARACTERIZED SELF AS OPTIMIST AND THEREFORE HE HOPES FOR RELIEF OF AREA TENSIONS BUT, REALISTICALLY, HE FAILS TO PERCEIVE ANY NOW. HE THEN SPOKE ABOUT HOW GERMAN LIBERALS AND OTHERS FAILED TO TAKE HITLER SERIOUSLY IN EARLY 30'S. PRIMIN NOTED IT VERY SIGNIFICANT THAT PRESIDENT HAD AGAIN WRITTEN HIM ON THIS MATTER; HE WOULD NEED AT LEAST 24 HOURS TO RECONSIDER QUESTION IN LIGHT THIS NEW COMMUNICATION.

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6

NLJ 01-188

By Sj, NARA, Date 4-11-02

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-2- 976, MARCH 23, 8 PM, FROM: TEL AVIV

THEN ESHKOL ASKED QUESTION WHICH HE REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES SUBSEQUENTLY. IS NASSER ASKING ABOUT DIMONA; DO WE KNOW HE IS TRULY CONCERNED ABOUT IT? PRIMIN RECALLED HE HAD MADE SOLEMN PUBLIC DECLARATION THEM DIMONA IS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES ONLY. HE ASKED US TO BRING HIM SIMILAR DECLARATION FROM OTHER SIDE". AMB OBSERVED NASSER DOES NOT NECESSARILY BELIEVE GOI STATEMENTS. PROMPTED BY YAHIL, ESHKOL SAID "IF US THINKS IT SUCH A GOOD IDEA TO REASSURE NASSER ABOUT DIMONA, IS US ASKING SOMETHING IN RETURN FROM HIM"? AMB SAID WE ARE ASKING SOMETHING FROM NASSER ALL THE TIME; MAINLY THAT UAR NOT AGGRESS, AND IF IT DOES AGAINST ISRAEL, WE WILL REACT STRONGLY.

AMB LISTED AND ELABORATED ON FIVE ORAL SUPPLEMENTARY POINTS. HE ADJUSTED THRUST OF ORAL POINT ONE OF DEPTTEL 810 ALONG FOLLOWING LINE: NASSER IS AWARE OF THE US VISITS TO DIMONA IN THE PAST; IF WE DO NOT AGAIN REASSURE HIM BEFORE LONG, HIS ALREADY CONSIDERABLE SUSPICION ABOUT ISRAEL NUCLEAR INTENTIONS WILL BE DEEPENED. NASSER WILL THINK EITHER THAT WE DON'T KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON AT DIMONA, OR THAT WE DO KNOW ISRAEL HAS TAKEN WEAPONS PATH. AMB SUMMARIZED HIS BASIC PRESENTATION BY SAYING THAT; WHEREAS ISRAEL THESIS IS THAT UNCERTAINTY ON THIS MATTER WILL DETER NASSER, PRESIDENT BELIEVES THAT UNCERTAINTY VERY MUCH INTENSIFIES DANGER OF A DESPERATE UAR MISCALCULATION.

ESHKOL ASKED WHY WE THINK TANKS ARE NOT PART OF THE SECURITY SITUATION. AMB THEN STRESSED (AS IT WAS NECESSARY TO DO SEVERAL TIMES SUBSEQUENTLY) THAT DIMENSIONS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROLIFERATION PROBLEM PUT IT IN A WHOLLY DIFFERENT CATEGORY THAN MATTERS OF CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS SUCH AS TANKS.

RE CAIRO SUMMIT CONFERENCE, ESHKOL ACKNOWLEDGED ARABS DID NOT DECIDE TO START WAR AGAINST ISRAEL TOMORROW. HE ADMITTED NASSER "MAYBE WAS A LITTLE INSTRUMENTAL" IN THIS OUTCOME. BUT WHAT DID THIS REALLY MEAN? AT CAIRO NASSER REVEALED PLANS FOR MILITARY ATTACK AGAINST ISRAEL SEVERAL YEARS AGO, AND ARABS DECIDED TO DIVERT HEADWATERS OF JORDAN RIVER. NASSER IS NOT WILLING NOW TO RISK A THIRD DEFEAT BY ISRAEL, BUT WHAT OF FUTURE? PERHAPS WATER DIVERSION WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED, BUT MONEY IS BEING COLLECTED; PLANS ARE BEING PREPARED. ESHKOL SAID HE IS NOT

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PANICKY ABOUT PRESENT SITUATION BUT HE CAN NOT KNOW FOR SURE WHAT ARAB INTENTIONS ARE. THIS UNCERTAINTY DICTATES ISRAEL'S REACTION IN SECURITY FIELD. HE ADDED ARABS MIGHT NOT BOMB TIBERIAS PUMPING STATION, BUT DIVERSION OF HEADWATERS "WOULD BE SAME THING". AMB NOTED OUT DOUBTS THAT SPITE DIVERSION PROJECTS WOULD BE IMPLEMENTED AND ENDEAVORED RETURN ESHKOL TO SUBJECT AT HAND. PRIMIN STATED NASSER IS PLANNING TO BUILD A LARGE NUCLEAR REACTOR. WILL US EXPERTS BE ABLE TO VISIT UAR REACTOR? AMB SAID ANY SUCH REACTOR WOULD PROBABLY BE COVERED BY ADEQUATE SAFEGUARDS. ESHKOL MADE CLEAR HE WOULD NOT RELY ON INSPECTIONS BY OTHER THAN US EXPERTS.

AMB REITERATED HOW STRONGLY USG THINKS IT IN ISRAEL'S INTEREST TO REASSURE NASSER AGAIN ON DIMONA. ESHKOL SAID THERE IS HONEST DIFFERENCE OF OPINION BETWEEN US ON THIS; A DIFFERENCE OF FEELING AND APPRECIATION. PERHAPS DISTANCE OF 2,000 MILES CONTRIBUTES TO THIS DIFFERENCE. GOI "MUST MAKE COLOSSAL EFFORT TO CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN OUR (RESPECTIVE) FEELING".

AMB SAID WE WERE DEALING HERE WITH QUESTION OF NASSER'S PSYCHOLOGY. TO EXTENT WE CAN REMOVE DOUBT RE ISRAEL'S NUCLEAR THREAT, NASSER'S ATTITUDE VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL WILL BE LESS BELLIGERENT. CONVERSELY, IF NASSER GETS THE IDEA ISRAEL IS MAKING ATOMIC WEAPONS, HE MIGHT WELL ORDER A DESPERATE PRE-EMPTIVE ATTACK. (AMB REVERTED TO THIS THEME ADVICE SUBSEQUENTLY.)

ESHKOL NOTED DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIS REPLY AND NASSER'S TO KHRUSHCHEV LETTER. NASSER HAD EXEMPTED ISRAEL FROM COUNTRIES AGAINST WHICH FORCE SHOULD NOT BE USED. ISRAEL HAD BEEN ONE OF FIRST TO ACCEDE TO TEST BAN TREATY, ETC. AMB SAID QUESTION IS ONE OF REASSURANCES ON SPECIFIC POINT PRESIDENT HAD RAISED. YAHIL SAID GOI HAD COME TO BELIEVE IN CERTAIN CASES THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF ISRAEL'S REACTIONS HAS DETERRENT EFFECT. THIS CONNECTION, HE CITED JORDANIAN SITUATION; FACT THAT NO ONE IS CERTAIN HOW ISRAEL WOULD REACT TO CHANGES IN JORDAN HAS PACIFYING EFFECT. YAHIL ASKED IF WE HAD ANY REAL INDICATION NASSER IS VERY DISTURBED BY ISRAEL'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM. AMB SAID MATTERS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND JORDANIAN SITUATION CAN NOT BE COMPARED. THE LATTER MATTER WOULD INVOLVE A TRADITIONAL MILITARY CONFRONTATION; NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAN RESULT IN COMPLETE DESTRUCTION OF COUNTRIES.

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THIS ENHANCES THE CHANCE FOR IRRATIONAL REACTION WHERE NUCLEAR POLICIES WERE INVOLVED.

PRIMIN SAID NEITHER GOI NOR USG IS CERTAIN ISRAEL IS NOT NOW UNDER AN EGYPTIAN NUCLEAR THREAT. EGYPTIANS ARE WORKING IN ATOMIC INSTALLATIONS IN INDIA, ETC. AMB SAID OUR BEST INTELLIGENCE IS THAT UAR DOES NOT HAVE NUCLEAR WEAPONS POTENTIAL NOR WILL IT HAVE FOR VERY LONG TIME; IF EVER.

ESHKOL ACKNOWLEDGED THERE WAS SOME WEIGHT IN OUR ARGUMENTS. HOWEVER, NASSER IS DEVELOPING MISSILES. GOI HAS NEW INFORMATION ABOUT PROGRESS ON UAR MISSILES AND PRIMIN HAS INSTRUCTED THAT THAT DATA BE PASSED TO USG. MONTHS AGO GOI STARTED TO TALK WITH USG ABOUT MISSILES AND TANKS. MUCH TIME HAS PASSED AND ISRAEL STILL LACKS DEFINITE ANSWER ON TANKS. ROWEN VOICED USG'S APPREHENSION RE POSSIBLE ISRAELI ACQUISITION (#) TOLD ROWEN, ISRAEL COULD NOT OBTAIN MISSILES FOR AT LEAST A YEAR, "AND IF YOU REALLY PRESS US ON THIS, IT WILL BE TWO OR THREE YEARS". STILL, NO TANKS. AMB ACKNOWLEDGED THAT DECISION ON REASSURING NASSER WAS DIFFICULT ONE FOR GOI BUT US STRONGLY BELIEVES ON BALANCE SUCH DECISION SHOULD BE MADE.

ESHKOL ASKED IF US HAD TOLD NASSER ISRAEL IS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT UAR MISSILES. IF SO, WHAT WAS NASSER'S REPLY? IS NASSER REALLY CONCERNED ABOUT DIMONA, OR IS THIS JUST "AN IDEA OF YOUR PEOPLE"? EMBOFF SAID WE HAVE HAD MANY RELIABLE INDICATIONS THAT NASSER'S CONCERN IS VERY REAL INDEED. AMB REITERATED THAT NASSER DID NOT EXPLOIT PREVIOUS ASSURANCES PUBLICLY OR THROUGH DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS; IF NO RENEWED ASSURANCE IS FORTHCOMING FAIRLY SOON, HE WILL DRAW NATURAL CONCLUSION. ARAD ASKED IF WE WERE SURE NASSER HAD NOT TOLD RUSSIANS ABOUT OUR DIMONA FINDINGS. ESHKOL INTERRUPTED TO ASK HOW LONG IT WOULD TAKE UAR TO CONSTRUCT A LARGE REACTOR, ASSUMING OUTSIDE FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE. AMB SAID MANY YEARS. ESHKOL SAID FLATLY HIS EXPERTS KNOW IF NASSER GOES FOR A LARGE REACTOR, ITS PURPOSE WOULD BE WEAPONS PRODUCTION. IN ENSUING DISCUSSION ABOUT FUEL ESHKOL NOTED UAR HAD NATURAL URANIUM RESOURCES. AMB SAID IF NASSER WERE EVER TO COMPLETE A LARGE REACTOR, IT WOULD BE MORE DIFFICULT FOR US TO OBTAIN ACCESS THERETO. HE DID NOT KNOW THAT WE HAD ACCESS ALSO TO DIMONA. ESHKOL EXPRESSED CERTAINTY NASSER WILL BUILD REACTOR FOR WEAPONS PRODUCTION. AMB

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SAID THIS NOT ALL CERTAIN. HE REMINDED PRIMIN WE DO NOT PROPOSE TO TELL NASSER ANY DETAILS ABOUT DIMONA INSPECTIONS; ONLY THE BASIC FINDING.

PRIMIN, FOR FIRST TIME DURING OUR EXTENSIVE DISCUSSIONS THIS ISSUE, THEN SIGNIFICANTLY NOTED THAT ISRAELI PUBLIC DOES NOT KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON AT DIMONA.

AS SESSION ENDED, ESHKOL EXPRESSED ASSUMPTION TALBOT HAD TRIED TO DISCOURAGE NASSER FROM MISSILE ACQUISITION. PRIMIN PROMISED TO GIVE PRESIDENT'S REQUEST FURTHER CONSIDERATION. .

COMMENT: DEPARTMENT MAY WISH PROVIDE SUPPLEMENTARY TALKING POINTS GEARED TO SPECIFICS OF ESHKOL'S REACTION, FOR POSSIBLE USE WHILE GOI RECONSIDERING THIS ISSUE.

BARNES

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(#) OMISSION, CORRECTION TO FOLLOW.

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Summary of a meeting between U.S. Ambassador Walworth Barbour and Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol regarding Egyptian concern over the Israeli nuclear reactor located in the city of Dimona. Department Of State, 23 Mar. 1964. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349545717/USDD?u=wash74137&sid=USDD&xid=f161554e>. Accessed 30 July 2020.



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