

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

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TO : NEA - Mr. Talbot

DATE: October 28, 1964

FROM : NE - Rodger P. Davies

SUBJECT: Israel's Request to Defer Inspection of the Dimona Reactor
(Your Meeting with Governor Harriman Today at 11 a.m.)
Problem: 12:15 p.m.*Rm file
her
11-3-64*

Mr. Bundy on October 23 has requested recommendations on Prime Minister Eshkol's appeal to the President to defer our next inspection of the Dimona Reactor until after the November 1965 Parliamentary elections in Israel (Tab A).

Analysts from AEC, CIA and the Department have concluded that Israel in the period between the last inspection of Dimona in January 1964 and January 1, 1966 could produce 6 to 12 kgs of plutonium from fuel elements fabricated by the Israelis themselves. This would be enough to provide material for one or two test devices. Available information strongly reinforces the inspection team's recommendation for an inspection this year. (Tab B).

Discussion:

1. The pretexts so far given to delay the proposed inspection seem flimsy. First Mr. Eshkol was indisposed because of his eye operation, Next, he cited domestic political problems but promised a firm date by November 1. Now, through private channels, he has asked for postponement of the inspection until after the November 1965 elections. Past experience, however, indicates a request for inspection at that time would not produce results until at least January 1, 1966.

2. Since neither the U.S. nor Israeli observers believe domestic political problems in Israel pose a serious threat to the leadership of the Prime Minister (Tab C), his request must be viewed in the context of Israel's conviction that maximum effective security measures are vital to its survival.

3. The pattern of Israel's activity before each U.S. inspection of Dimona suggests the use of Israeli acquiescence usually as a lever to obtain U.S. concessions. The first two inspections in May 1961 and September 1962 occurred when Israel was seeking U.S. support for its diversion of Jordan waters and approval for acquisition of Hawk missiles. Israel agreed to the third inspection in January 1964 when it was pressing hard for U.S. tanks. This pattern suggests that the effort to defer the next inspection might relate to Israel's interest in acquisition of U.S.

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combat aircraft and ground-to-ground missiles.

4. Since Israel has contracted with France to acquire ground-to-ground missiles, Prime Minister Eshkol's appeal may be related to a decision to develop in secret a nuclear weapons capability. Neither Ben-Gurion nor Eshkol have ruled out the possibility of Israel's embarking on a nuclear weapons program.

5. In view of the fact that a) Israel has the technical capability, b) the Israelis were building fuel preparation facilities well in excess of normal research requirements when inspected in January 1964, c) the Dimona facility has been secretly expanded, d) French technicians, whose presence provided a measure of safeguard, (we believe have all left), e) Israel has purchased 100 tons of "yellow cake" uranium oxide from Argentina but not covered by IAEA safeguards and f) in the view of our experts Israel could produce a nuclear device within about three years, we believe it imperative to press Mr. Eshkol, preferably before November 3, to set a date for inspection in the near future. We believe it important to demonstrate to him that our concern about nuclear proliferation transcends domestic political considerations. Failure to do so will encourage the Prime Minister to use his own domestic political problems as justification for resisting pressures mounted after our elections to set an inspection date before November 1965.

Recommendation:

1. That you strongly support informing the Israelis prior to November 3, 1964 that the U.S. Government wishes Israel to comply with its commitment for an inspection every six months.
2. That it be made clear that failure to accede to our inspection request could bring into question existing U.S. military and economic aid commitments to Israel.

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Duplicity, Deception, and Self-Deception: Israel, the United States, and the Dimona Inspections, 1964-65

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