

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

November 5, 1964

~~SECRET~~
EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTION

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. McGEORGE BUNDY
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: Israel's Request to Defer
Inspection of the Dimona
Reactor

Dimona

*Request'd to me & B
w/RW K memo to
Pres 11/17/64*

*Colace new by K...
See his memo
to J... 11/17/64*

Prime Minister Eshkol's appeal to the President to defer the next inspection of the Dimona reactor until after his November 1965 parliamentary elections confronts us with a painful dilemma. We have little evidence that Eshkol is in as difficult a spot as his message would suggest or that another secret inspection of Dimona would significantly affect his party's election prospects. The decision to permit periodic U.S. inspection of Dimona was originally taken by Ben-Gurion and reconfirmed by Eshkol, presumably after full Cabinet discussion. Deputy Defense Minister Peres was involved in the decision. Thus, we find it hard to believe that "hard liners" in the Israeli Cabinet could buck Eshkol on a decision in which they and Ben-Gurion participated. Moreover, neither U.S. nor Israeli observers believe that domestic political problems pose a serious threat to the leadership of Prime Minister Eshkol, who has had a series of domestic victories.

Our inability to fathom Eshkol's "argument for delay" naturally heightens our security fears. Contrary to Mr. Eshkol's reported statement that "there is no possibility that the Dimona reactor could be converted to military purposes in so short a period of time," we believe that to allow a gap of about two years since Israel's reactor went critical (our last inspection was in January 1964) could be highly dangerous. Failure to inspect Dimona before November 1965 would allow Israel time to produce enough nuclear material for one or two test devices

We are further concerned because

3.4(b)(1)

SANITIZED

~~SECRET~~

GROUP 3

Downgraded at 12 year intervals;
not automatically declassified.

E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6
NLJ/RAC 01-245

By SJ NARA, Date 8-11-03

NOV 5 1964

~~SECRET~~

- 2 -

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) [REDACTED] d) French technicians, whose presence provided a measure of safeguard, are believed to have left, and e) Israel has purchased 100 tons of "yellow cake" uranium oxide from Argentina, not covered by IAEA safeguards. Although Prime Minister Eshkol has stated orally that Israel's nuclear activity is peaceful, neither Ben-Gurion nor Eshkol has ruled out the possibility of Israel's embarking on a nuclear weapons program if the situation in the Near East warranted.

We conclude we must view the Prime Minister's request for postponement of the inspection in the context of Israel's conviction that maximum effective security measures are vital to its survival. Since Israel has contracted with France to acquire ground-to-ground missiles, his appeal could relate to a decision to develop in secret a nuclear weapons capability.

Following upon the explosion of a Chinese Communist nuclear device, failure to press Israel to meet its commitment for an inspection every six months could vitiate our policy of opposition to nuclear proliferation, weaken the test ban agreement, and encourage other countries such as India to develop a nuclear weapons capability of their own. It would also jeopardize our efforts to persuade Nasser to slow down the U.A.R. sophisticated weapons buildup and could drive him to greater dependence on the Soviet Union. Moreover, to permit Israel to renege on an inspection commitment which was secured by us only as the result of long and painful pressure, including repeated intervention at Presidential level, would undermine our position that we must have access to Dimona to assure ourselves against nuclear proliferation.

Ambassador Barbour agrees to the need for inspection of Dimona this year and has proposed 1) a visit in the next month or two, 2) a waiver of the Israeli commitment for subsequent six-monthly visits until after the November 1965 elections, and 3) an offer not to communicate the results of the visit to Nasser until after the November 1965 elections.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

- 3 -

We believe it is imperative to press Mr. Eshkol to set a date for inspection in the near future. We recommend approval of the enclosed telegram to Embassy Tel Aviv, which is responsive to Ambassador Barbour's proposal and urges scheduling of the visit to Dimona in late November.


W. Averell Harriman
Under Secretary for Political Affairs

Enclosures:

1. Proposed Telegram.
2. Technical Assessment.

~~SECRET~~

74a

~~SECRET~~

Ambassy TEL ACTIV

EXDTS

FOR AMBASSADOR

VERBATIM TEXT

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5

NSC Memo, 1/30/95, State Dept. Guidelines

By jc, NARA, Date 8-28-01

Please deliver following oral message to Prime Minister from President Johnson as soon as possible:

QUOTE: I deeply appreciate the frankness of your message outlining the problems posed for you by the timing of our next visit to the Dimona reactor. I can, of course, understand the ever-present difficulty of reconciling conflicting domestic and foreign interests.

Nevertheless, I do feel bound to urge upon you the essentiality of arranging this visit at a very early date. We are engaged in a continuing effort to prevent proliferation of sophisticated weapons in the world and especially in the Near East. I believe you fully agree that this effort is in the interests of Israel. A vital element in its success is our ability to assure all parties that none of them has attained or is seeking a nuclear capability, and to give this assurance we must be able to satisfy ourselves on this score.

The agreement with you on semi-annual visits to Dimona is particularly important to our efforts with Nasser, because he knows, as does the rest of the world...

MEA:JMJernegan:rvc:10/30/64

MEA - Phillips Talbot

White House -

M - Governor Harriman

ME - Mr. Davies

S/S -

~~SECRET~~NOV 5 1964
FORM DS-322
6-63

Corrections made on original green MUST be made on this and other flimsy work copies before delivery to Telecommunications Operations Division

2

Ambassy TEL AVIV

~~SECRET~~

of the world, that Israel is probably the only country in the Near East which has the scientific capability to produce nuclear weapons and in addition also has a facility in being which could be converted to such production. If we were unable to reassure him periodically, he might well be driven to greater dependence on the Soviet Union and even to irrational military action against Israel. He would, of course, be more ~~resistant~~ ^{resistant} to our urgings that he limit his own arms development, particularly in the missile field.

The problem is made more acute by the recent explosion of a nuclear device by Communist China. This has alarmed many countries and made some of them--such as India--think again whether they should not attempt nuclear programs of their own. This is likely to focus Arab suspicion even more upon Israel.

You may be sure that our interest in the security of your country remains unchanged. The grave responsibility which this puts upon us is an important factor in my conviction that we must leave no stone unturned in our efforts to maintain peace.

I understand that some of the internal problems you face appear to be easing. I hope, therefore, that you will see your way clear to arrange for a visit by our people to Dimona in late November. END QUOTE.

We have studied considerations cited in your recent telegram and appreciate your effort reconcile divergent US and Israeli interests. Following Department's reaction to your three point proposal and guidelines for discussion with Eshkol:

1. Agree that Dimona inspection within 1-2 months imperative.

2.....

Corrections made on original ~~gram~~ ^{message} be made on this and other
filmy work copies before delivery to Telegraph Branch

3

Ambassy TEL AVIV

~~SECRET~~

2. We willing consider waiving Israel commitment to six-monthly inspection until after November 1965 elections contingent upon satisfactory findings next inspection and without prejudice to resumption schedule of six-monthly visits thereafter.

3. We willing postpone passing results inspection to Nasser until after November 1965, unless situation in Near East such that US and Israeli interests better served by informing him. We would, of course, consult COI before such step.

GP-3

END

Corrections made on original ~~given~~ MUST be made on this and other flimsy work copies before delivery to Telegraph Branch

3343
746

~~SECRET~~

EXDIS

TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT

Analysts from the AEC, and the Department of State met on 27 October to examine the consequences of postponing the next inspection of the Dimona reactor site until 1 January 1966, and concluded the following:

3,4(b)(1)

A. In the period between the last inspection of Dimona in January 1964 and 1 January 1966, the Dimona reactor, operating at a power level designed to maximize plutonium production, 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.

B. All the facilities necessary to acquire plutonium, except a chemical separation plant, are or soon will be available. The 100 tons of uranium concentrate recently acquired from Argentina far exceeds the uranium requirements for the Dimona reactor, if operated at stated power and irradiation levels. If the Israelis intended to maximize reactor operations for production of plutonium suitable for weapons, the 100 tons of uranium concentrate would be sufficient for about two years.

C. The critical element for the Israelis in obtaining fissionable material for a weapon is the capability to separate the plutonium from the irradiated fuel elements from the Dimona reactor. A chemical separation plant could be built to process reactor cores from Dimona in about two years after a decision to do so, i.e., if started shortly after the last inspection in January 1964, it could be operational by early 1966. If such a schedule were followed, the Israelis would begin to acquire significant quantities of weapons grade plutonium by mid-1966. There is a possibility that the Israelis could separate small quantities of plutonium in pilot-plant operations during this period. The extent of their capabilities to separate plutonium, however, could only be determined by on-site inspection.

SANITIZED

E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6

NJ/RAC 01-245

By SJ NARA, Date 8-11-03

~~SECRET~~

EXDIS

Group 3

Downgraded at 12 year intervals; not automatically declassified.

~~SECRET~~

EXDIS

2

Discussion

The Israelis have bought 100 tons of uranium concentrate from Argentina in the last year and are planning to negotiate for an additional 100 tons soon. These amounts are far in excess of the requirements of the Dimona reactor operated for research purposes (a single core loading of about 8 tons of metal, the equivalent of 10 tons of concentrate, would last about two years.) It is unlikely that Israel would purchase large quantities of uranium concentrate for stockpiling, since it is readily available under safeguards on the world market at a lower price (about \$13.00 per kg as opposed to the \$17.9 paid by the Israelis for the Argentine concentrate.)

A plant for reducing the concentrate to metal is now in operation at Dimona. If operated at full capacity it could produce about 50 to 60 tons of uranium metal per year, roughly the equivalent of processing 60 to 70 tons of concentrate.

A facility for fuel element fabrication is expected to be in operation by the end of 1964 and will be able to produce a complete core for the Dimona reactor in two or three months, or four to six reactor cores per year.

A chemical separation pilot plant was not yet in existence in January 1964, at the time of the last inspection, although the building had been constructed. The Israelis said at the time no decision had been made to go forward with installation of equipment. The original plan called for a processing capacity of about one kg. of uranium per day, i.e., pilot plant size. A full size plant capable of handling several reactor cores per year would take about two years to build at a cost of about \$20 million. If the Israelis started construction of such a plant in early 1964, following the last inspection, they could begin processing a backlog of irradiated fuel elements by early 1966 and have separated 6 to 12 kg. of plutonium by the later part of 1966.

The Dimona inspection teams recommended in January 1964 that the next inspection, from a technical point of view, should

be within

~~SECRET~~

EXDIS

DISSEMINATION COPY

~~SECRET~~

EXDIS

- 3 -

be within one year, for the following reasons: "(a) by that time the reactor is expected to be at full power, (b) fuel material production facilities, although possibly not yet complete, may be more accurately assessed, and (c) the probability that their fuel production capacity is at a level inconsistent with the requirements of currently planned programs may be more accurately evaluated."

The new information that has become available since January 1964, strongly reinforces the inspection team's recommendation for an inspection this year.

~~SECRET~~

EXDIS



This document is from the holdings of:

The National Security Archive

Suite 701, Gelman Library, The George Washington University

2130 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20037

Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, nsarchiv@gwu.edu

[Read related article:](#)

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

2020-11-03