

TELEGRAM

Foreign Service of the
United States of America

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Date: Mar 22, 1965
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ACTION: Secstate WASHDC 1205

DIMONA VISITS

Ref: Deptel 959, Embtel 1199

AE 11-2 Dimona

A. YEDIOT AHARONOT carried long feature article March 18 (Embassy translation available late 19) by stalwart Ben-Gurionist Ben-Porat, revealing several new details on visits. It speaks of "crisis of confidence" between US and Israel during Ben-Gurion's last two years over Dimona reactor, and mentions "polite but firm letter" from President Kennedy to Ben-Gurion requesting two regular visits by US scientists each year. Article implies Ben-Gurion stoutly resisted this Kennedy request, replying to President Kennedy during his meeting in New York that Israel could not reveal scientific secrets unless its Dimona partner, France, agreed--which DeGaulle refused to do. Only later, under Eshkol, did GOI give in to visits, with French agreement, article says.

Article then describes visits in mid-1964 and January 1965 by three US scientists each time, occurring rather hastily over weekends, when most reactor personnel absent. Despite satisfaction expressed by these scientists as to

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peaceful nature of reactor, article continues, request for two inspections per year was renewed, and Harriman came to Israel recently "with list of precise questions."

Ben-Porat professes considerable indignation at alleged US discovery of Dimona through aerial photography in 1960, and implications of continuing "nuclear espionage." He alleges Israeli public (including number of important officials in GOI) upset at learning of visits through foreign sources after own Government kept it secret from them. Danger lies in such visits becoming routine matter, he asserts. "Grave impression" created by chain of recent phenomena, including a) Harriman mission's linking of arms supplies to Arab diversion, b) transfer of Independence Day parade from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv, and c) revelation that Dimona "holy of holies" has been opened to American inspection under American pressure. Nevertheless Ben-Porat concludes (perhaps tongue-in-cheek) such grave matters should not degenerate into domestic Israeli political issue.

B. In opposition to Ben-Porat, Jerusalem correspondent same paper (who is believed to be pro-Eshkol) reiterated on 19th

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comment made by DAVAR on 18th (Embtel 1190) that two of four visits took place during Ben-Gurion term of office. He added Eshkol expected discuss matter in regular Cabinet meeting 21st.

C. Paris correspondent MAARIV (Uri Dan) reported March 18 French Government opposes principle of US visits to Dimona. This allegation taken up by Liberal-Herut Party organ HABOKER on 22nd. Dan also speculated that leak from USG sources appeared to be accidental, and USG now fears publicity may result in Israeli refusal permit further visits. This theme too was picked up in HABOKER editorial on 22nd, with argument advanced that Israel may appear to be US satellite ~~if it~~ ^{if it} permits further visits, and such appearance could harm Israeli activities in sensitive areas of world such as Africa.

D. No other papers have, as of morning 22nd, adverted to visits. If subject came up during Cabinet meeting 21st, that fact has apparently not yet leaked to press. Official communique issued press contained no such reference.

E. COMMENT: Ben-Porat article forces us partly revise estimate of situation as of March 19 (Embtel 1199). Ben-Gurion and Eshkol sides are now each releasing bits and pieces of information tailored to reflect creditably on themselves and

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against opponents. HABOKER and MAARIV must be presumed to be outsiders, until proven ~~am~~ otherwise. They likely sniff good political issue and interested in keeping it exposed. Lack of other press articles on matter somewhat unusual, and raises possibility GOI and Ben-Gurionites each cautioning their supporters to go slow. Possibility cannot be excluded Eshkol-controlled GOI, and Ben-Gurionites each aiming at same end--justification ~~for~~ for refusing further permission visits. Even if not yet decided, GOI may possibly come to seek such an end as reaction to further publicity, particularly if it comes to believe US leak deliberate. As of now, however, Embassy does not draw that conclusion. Evidence accumulated to date shows GOI still probing and still attempting limit public disclosures, while simultaneously trying to check any Ben-Gurion political offensive through leak of key argument that Ben-Gurion started whole business.

GP 3

BARBOUR

GBL
POL:GBLambakis/SCI:RTWebber/tt/3/22/65

Coordination: DCM:WNDale *(in draft)*

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

2020-11-03