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TO : The Department of State

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**COPY NO. 1** **SERIES A**  
DATE: May 29, 1963

FROM : Amembassy: TEL AVIV

SUBJECT : Visits to Dimona; Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's Letter of May 27 to President Kennedy

REF : Emtels 948, 949 (Eyes Only to the President and the Secretary)

Enclosed is the original of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's May 27 response to the President's message of May 19, 1963.

*Walworth Barbour*  
Walworth Barbour

Enclosure: *aa*

Letter of May 27, 1963

Group 3  
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Drafted by: POL:SEP/mer, Jr; kad 5-28-63

...s and Classification Approved by:

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Tel Aviv's  
948-5/27/63*

*Copy #3B of 4*

*8295*

ראש הממשלה  
THE PRIME MINISTER

PERSONAL  
SECRET

*E.O.*

Jerusalem, May 27, 1963

Dear Mr. President,

I have given careful consideration to your letter of May 19 and to Ambassador Barbour's explanation of your policy in the conversations which I have had with him.

Let me assure you, at the outset, Mr. President, that our policy, on nuclear research and development has not changed since I had the opportunity of discussing it with you in May 1961. I fully understand the dangers involved in the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and I sympathize with your efforts to avoid such a development. I fear that in the absence of an agreement between the Great Powers on general disarmament, there is little doubt that these weapons will, sooner or later, find their way into the arsenals of China and then of various European states and India. In this letter, however, I propose to deal not with the general international aspect on which you express your views so clearly in your letter - but with Israel's own position and attitude on this question.

In our conversation in 1961, I explained to you that we were establishing a nuclear training and research reactor in Dimona with French assistance. This assistance has been given on condition that the reactor will be devoted exclusively to peaceful purposes. I regard this condition as absolutely binding, both on general grounds of good faith and because France has extended military assistance of unique value to Israel in her struggle for self-defence, from the Arab invasion of 1948 down to the present day.

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ראש הממשלה  
THE PRIME MINISTER

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In the same sense I informed you in 1961 that we are developing this reactor because we believe, on the strength of expert scientific advice, that within a decade or so the use of nuclear power will be economically viable and of great significance for our country's development. I went on to add that we should have to follow developments in the Middle East. This is still our position today.

Between us and France there exists a bilateral arrangement concerning the Dimona reactor similar to that which we have with the United States in the reactor at Nachal Sureiq. While we do not envisage a system of formal United States control at the Dimona reactor which the United States has not helped to establish or construct, as in the case of the reactor at Nachal Sureiq, we do agree to further annual visits to Dimona by your representatives, such as have already taken place.

The "start-up" time of the Dimona reactor will not come until the end of this year or early in 1964. At that time, the French companies will hand the reactor over to us. I believe that this will be the most suitable time for your representatives to visit the reactor. At that stage they will be able to see it in an initial stage of operation, whereas now nothing is going on there except building construction.

I hope, Mr. President, that this proposal meets the concern expressed in your letter of May 19.

In 1961, you suggested the possibility that a visit be carried out by a scientist from a "neutral" country. This idea is acceptable to us, but a visit by an American expert would be equally acceptable from our point of view.

I appreciate what you say in your letters, Mr. President, about the commitment of the United States to Israel's security. While I understand your concern

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ראש הממשלה  
THE PRIME MINISTER

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With the prospect of a proliferation of nuclear weapons, we in Israel cannot be blind to the more actual danger now confronting us. I refer to the danger arising from destructive "conventional" weapons in the hands of neighboring governments which openly proclaim their intention to attempt the annihilation of Israel. This is our people's major anxiety. It is a well-founded anxiety, and I have nothing at this stage to add to my letter of May 12 which is now, as I understand, receiving your active consideration.

Yours sincerely,



D. Ben-Gurion

His Excellency  
Mr. John F. Kennedy,  
President of the United States of America  
Washington, D.C.,  
U.S.A.

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