

304. Telegram From the Department of State to Secretary of State Vance and Multiple Diplomatic Posts¹

Washington, August 24, 1977, 2137Z

Tosec 90129/202215. USUN for Amb Leonard, Lagos for Amb Young, White House Eyes Only for Brzezinski. Fol rpt Tel Aviv 6330 Action SecState 24 Aug 77.

Quote Secret Tel Aviv 6330. Subject: Israeli-South African Nuclear Cooperation. Ref: State 200985.²

1. I saw Evron August 24, thanked him for Begin's response,³ and asked for additional clarification as instructed in reftel. I gave him exact text of inquiry as stated in para one and two of reftel. Evron said that of course Begin was leaving tomorrow for Romania and he was not sure he could get a response until after his return. I said I understood, but asked whether he could not at least have some word with Begin today so that the Prime Minister could give the necessary policy direction for the information to be prepared. Evron said he would try to do so.

2. Evron conveyed to me this afternoon the following: Quote: The Prime Minister has asked me to reiterate to you his previous statement that his government has no contact nor has it ever cooperated with the Government of South Africa in developing or producing nuclear weapons. In reply to your inquiry of today, the Prime Minister has instructed me to inform you that his government does not cooperate with South Africa in the production of nuclear explosives of any kind, nor are we aware of any Israeli private firm which is active in this field. End quote.

3. I pointed out to Evron that this statement, while very helpful, did not answer the question again posed in para two of reftel concerning broader Israeli-South African cooperation in the nuclear field. Evron said that he had given me the total response conveyed to him by the Prime Minister. He suggested that I could of course pursue the matter further with Foreign Minister Dayan in Begin's absence if I wished.

4. Comment: This has been a cool and careful exchange. I think we have gotten the explicit assurances we are seeking with respect to

¹ Source: Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Cables File, State Department Out, Box 108, 8/21-31/77. Secret; Sensitive; Cherokee; Immediate; Nodis. Sent to USUN, Lagos, Paris, Bonn, Pretoria, London, and the White House. Printed from a copy that was received in the White House Situation Room. Drafted and approved by Wisner. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, N770005-0339)

² See Document 303.

³ See Document 300.

weapons cooperation and nuclear explosives in general, but it is now clear to me that this is all we will get with regard to the nuclear field unless I take the issue up directly with the Prime Minister. If I am to do so, I think I will need some more talking points which provide a persuasive rationale for our pressing the point. (In this connection, the further information which was promised to be forthcoming through other channels in para four of State 195546⁴ has not yet arrived in Tel Aviv.) I appreciate having the relevant paras of recent legislation contained in State 201049,⁵ and can, of course, draw on these if instructed to do so. However, I think we need to have a somewhat franker and less threatening tone to the presentation if one is to be made to Begin, in light of the assurances he has already given us, if we are to elicit more details about the aspects of their collaboration with South Africa which do not touch directly on weapons or explosives. I am quite ready to go back to bat on this again, but let us be sure of what we really need to learn and be careful of the way we argue our requirement.

5. Department please repeat this message to the Secretary.

Unquote

Christopher

⁴ See Document 292.

⁵ In telegram 201049 to Tel Aviv, August 23, the Department transmitted sections of the Foreign Assistance Act relating to nuclear transfers. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, D770304–1299)