

Department of State

Israel / 27R

SECRET

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Action

Control: 14116
Rec'd: JULY 17, 1963
2:48 PM

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Info

FROM: TEL AVIV

EYES ONLY

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TO: Secretary of State

NO: 74, JULY 17, 7 PM

PRIORITY

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DEPTEL 19 EMBTEL 14

PRIMIN ESHKOL TODAY HANDED ME A LETTER DATED JULY 17 TO THE PRESIDENT CLASSIFIED "PERSONAL, SECRET" (ORIGINAL BEING TRANSMITTED SEPARATELY) OF WHICH FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT:

"DEAR MR. PRESIDENT,
I HAVE RECEIVED YOUR LETTER WHICH AMBASSADOR BARBOUR TRANSMITTED TO ME ON JULY 5 AND HAVE TAKEN NOTE OF THE AMBASSADOR'S EXPLANATORY REMARKS.

I SHOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU VERY SINCERELY, MR. PRESIDENT, FOR YOUR FRIENDLY CONGRATULATIONS TO ME ON MY ASSUMPTION OF THE OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER. I HOPE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISRAEL'S TIES WITH THE UNITED STATES TO WHICH THE NEW ISRAEL GOVERNMENT, LIKE ITS PREDECESSORS, ATTACHES THE VERY HIGHEST IMPORTANCE.

FOR ANYONE HOLDING MY RESPONSIBILITIES THE CENTRAL ISSUE IS, OF COURSE, THAT OF ISRAEL'S SECURITY. WE ARE THE ONLY STATE IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WHOSE EXISTENCE IS CHALLENGED AND, INDEED, OPENLY THREATENED BY ALL ITS NEIGHBORS. THIS GIVES ISRAEL'S SECURITY PROBLEM A UNIQUE INTENSITY AND URGENCY.

I AM NOW GIVING CAREFUL STUDY TO YOUR LETTER OF JULY 5, AS WELL AS TO THE RECORDS OF CONVERSATION WHICH THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER, MR. BEN-GURION HELD WITH YOU OVER TWO YEARS AGO AND THE
SUBSEQUENT CORRESPONDENCE
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SUBSEQUENT CORRESPONDENCE, AND AM ACQUAINTING MYSELF WITH ALL THE DETAILS OF THE DIMONA PROJECT, WHICH I HAVE PREVIOUSLY FOLLOWED ONLY IN ITS GENERAL OUTLINE. I FULLY UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE WHICH YOU ATTACH TO THIS MATTER, MR. PRESIDENT, AND I HOPE TO SEND YOU A SUBSTANTIVE REPLY AT AN EARLY DATE.

YOURS SINCERELY,
LEVI ESHKOL"

ESHKOL SAID THAT HE PERSONALLY WISHED TO MAKE TWO POINTS ORALLY.

1. HE REFERRED TO BEN-GURION'S LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT DATED MAY 12 AND, NOTING THAT HIS GOVERNMENT IS ONE OF CONTINUITY, SAID IDEAS ON "SOLUTIONS" PROPOSED THAT LETTER SHARED BY HIS GOVERNMENT AND COLLEAGUES AND THEY ANTICIPATE RESPONSE WITH SPECIAL INTEREST.

2. ONE SENTENCE IN PRESIDENT'S LETTER OF JULY 5TH, THAT REFERRING TO POSSIBLE JEOPARDIZING OF U.S. COMMITMENT AND SUPPORT HAS CAUSED HIM "SURPRISE" - HE WAS, HE SAID, SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT WORD. ISRAEL WOULD DO WHAT IT HAD TO DO FOR ITS NATIONAL SECURITY AND TO SAFEGUARD ITS SOVEREIGN RIGHTS. HE WOULD PREFER TO BELIEVE THAT IN THE PURSUIT THIS COURSE ISRAELI-U.S. FRIENDSHIP WOULD GROW, A HOPE IN WHICH HIS COLLEAGUES FULLY CONCURRED. I SAID I HAD NO ADDITIONAL CLARIFICATION OF SENTENCE TO WHICH HE REFERRED (LAST SENTENCE PARAGRAPH THREE) BUT MY INTERPRETATION WAS THAT STATEMENT THEREIN IS FACTUAL. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF SUSPICIOUS PEOPLE AND PEOPLE LESS THAN FAVORABLY DISPOSED TO CLOSE U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONS, BOTH IN THE U.S. AND ELSEWHERE, WHO WOULD CAPITALIZE ON OUR FAILURE TO OBTAIN RELIABLE INFORMATION ON THIS VITAL SUBJECT TO COMPLICATE THE CONTINUANCE OF OUR COMMITMENT AND SUPPORT. ESHKOL ASKED HOW WE WOULD VIEW A POSSIBLE PROPOSAL FROM ISRAEL THAT ISRAEL WOULD CONSULT THE U.S. IN ADVANCE IN THE EVENT THAT, SOME TIME IN THE DISTANT FUTURE, DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST MADE IT NECESSARY FOR HER TO EMBARK ON A NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM. HE ADDED HE FERVENTLY HOPED AND ALTHOUGH NOT NOW A RELIGIOUS MAN WOULD BE PREPARED TO PRAY DAILY THAT THIS NEVER WOULD HAPPEN. I SAID I COULD NOT ANSWER, HAVING NO INFORMATION AS TO U.S. GOVT. VIEWS SUCH

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AN IDEA. ESHKOL CONTINUED THAT IT SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT FOR WORD OF SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENT TO BE ACCEPTABLE, INQUIRING WHETHER WE WOULD EXPECT INSPECT, FOR EXAMPLE, INDIAN NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT. I AGREED WORD OF SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT, THAT THAT IS TYPE OF WORLD TOWARD WHICH WE ALL EXERTING EVERY ENDEAVOR, BUT THAT UNFORTUNATELY THAT POINT NOT YET REACHED.

I CONCLUDED BY REITERATING IMPORTANCE U.S. ATTACHES TO PROBLEM OF NUCLEAR WEAPON PROLIFERATION, EMPHASIZING THIS NOT WITH SPECIFIC RELATION TO ISRAEL BUT WORLD WIDE, I ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT IN EXPLOSIVE ATMOSPHERE OF MIDDLE EAST INTRODUCTION NUCLEAR WEAPONS HERE WOULD BE ESPECIALLY GRAVE. PRIME MINISTER NODDED IN APPARENT ACQUIESCENCE. HE TERMINATED CONVERSATION BY SAYING HE AND COLLEAGUES WILL GIVE PROBLEM MOST CAREFUL STUDY.

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