

RM/R File

MAR 12 1964

3951

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. McGEORGE BUNDY
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: Reassurance for Nasser on
Israeli Nuclear Activities.

On behalf of President Johnson we requested Prime Minister Eshkol to permit us to inform President Nasser that our recent inspection of the Dimona reactor confirmed the peaceful nature of Israel's nuclear development activities (Deptel 747). The Prime Minister turned down our request on grounds that, given Nasser's belligerent public statements, apprehension as to Israel's atomic potential would serve as a deterrent to preparations for a military adventure (Tel Aviv telegrams 916 and 919). Embassy Cairo, however, believes lack of reasonable assurance on Israeli nuclear developments will spur Nasser to develop or acquire matching sophisticated weapons and might even cause him to launch a pre-emptive attack on Israel. (Cairo telegram 2024). AE 11-2 202

We recommend approval of the enclosed telegram instructing our Ambassador to convey a Presidential message to Mr. Eshkol urging reconsideration of his decision. Past experience on the Dimona issue indicates that persistent graduated presidential pressure is necessary to secure Israeli cooperation.

DON T. CHRISTENSEN
Benjamin H. Read
Executive Secretary

Enclosures:

1. Draft Telegram to Tel Aviv.
2. Deptels 747 and 757.
3. Tel Aviv Telegrams 916 and 919.
4. Cairo Telegram 2024.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Origin class'n Change class'n

With concurrence of NSC

Security In part and extent as shown

EO 12812, Sec. 1.3 (a)

FRQ/HDR by SPW 1477/94

NEA:NE:HERussell:rmv:3/11/64

NEA - Mr. Jernegan
NE - Mr. Davies

GROUP 3

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S/S-RO

MAR 11 1964

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 19, 1964

To: Benjamin H. Read

From: McGeorge Bundy S

For transmittal, a revised letter to
Eshkol, approved by the President.

*Cable sent 4/19/64
JL*

AE 11-2 ISR

*Regarding Israel Nuclear
Activities*

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Approved by [REDACTED]

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AmEmbassy TEL AVIV

LIMDIS

Please convey following message to Eshkol from President:

QUOTE

March 19, 1964

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

I am distressed to learn from Ambassador Barbour that you feel unable to approve of our reassuring President Nasser about the peaceful character of the Dimona reactor. We are far from confident that apprehension as to Israel's atomic potential will, as you suggest, help deter Nasser from attacking Israel. Quite the contrary, we believe that Nasser's fear of a developing Israeli nuclear power may drive him to a choice between accelerating the UAR military build-up or a desperate pre-emptive attack. Either of these choices would have the gravest effects on the security of Israel, We think it plain that any possible deterrent value that might come from keeping Nasser in the dark is trivial compared to these risks.

Text received from WH:mj 3/19/64

S/S - Mr. McKesson

NE - Mr. Davies
M - Gov. Harriman

White House - Mr. Bundy

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Tel Aviv

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It is also hard to see how Nasser could adversely exploit reassurance that Israel's nuclear activities are for peaceful purposes. We certainly do not intend to provide him with details. Nor did he misuse our reassurances when, with the agreement of your government, we last informed him along these lines. Indeed our doing so served to ease Arab-Israeli tensions.

Therefore I hope you will reconsider your decision on this matter, on which I am sure you will agree that our ultimate interest--enhancement of Israel's security--is the same as yours.

With warm regards,

Sincerely,

Lyndon B. Johnson.

UNQUOTE

You should make following points orally to Eshkol:

1. Nasser aware past US visits to Dimona and eventually will learn of January visit from other countries Israel has agreed we may take into our confidence. Preferable permit us give Nasser information directly to gain maximum favorable results.
2. Content February 22 Nasser speech not new. Every Arab politician must inveigh against Israel to survive politically. Realistic and moderate resolutions taken by Arab Summit Conference reflect

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Nasser's position more clearly than his words.

3. Al-Ahram editorialist Hassansin Haikal, confidant of Nasser, has publicly voiced UAR recognition that war against Israel is not possible because of US support.

4. Israel's security lies in US capability and preparedness to ward off aggression. Total security is not possible, however; even US lacks that.

5. Tank issue unrelated to Nasser reassurance.

FYI. Jewish Observer February 14 carried article entitled "Dimona Report Studies" that referred to "a top secret report from American experts who had studied the potentialities of Israel's principal nuclear reactor at Dimona. . ." While word visit not used, idea is implicit especially to those aware already of our earlier inspections. Moreover, early in February Israeli newsman here specifically inquired about US interest in Dimona and rumored visit by US scientific team. END FYI.

END

GP-3

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March 14, 1964 - 12:00 Noon

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

LIMDIS

Please convey following message to Eshkol from President:

"Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

"I am distressed to learn from Ambassador Barbour that you feel unable to approve of our reassuring President Nasser about the peaceful character of the Dimona reactor. We are far from confident that apprehension as to Israel's atomic potential will, as you suggest, help deter Nasser from attacking Israel. Quite the contrary, we believe that Nasser's fear of a developing Israeli nuclear power may drive him to a choice between accelerating the UAR military buildup or a desperate pre-emptive attack. Either of these choices would have the gravest effects on the security of Israel. We think it plain that any possible deterrent value that might come from keeping Nasser in the dark is trivial compared to these risks.

"It is also hard to see how Nasser could adversely exploit reassurance that Israel's nuclear activities are for peaceful purposes. We certainly do not intend to provide him with details. Nor did he misuse our reassurances when, with the agreement of your government, we last informed him along these lines. Indeed our doing so served to ease Arab-Israeli tensions.

"Therefore I hope you will reconsider your decision on this matter, on which I am sure you will agree that our ultimate interest--enhancement

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of Israel's security--is the same as yours.

"With warm regards,

Sincerely,

Lyndon B. Johnson."

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

2020-11-03