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Memorandum

The blue check above indicates that Mr. Talbot has seen this memo, per ENWilliams, NEA, Staff Asst

TO : NEA - Mr. Talbot
Thru : NEA - Mr. Terregan
FROM : NE - Rodger P. Davies

DATE: October 29, 1964
OK to
Indef. per
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11-3-64

SUBJECT: Dangers of Delaying Israel's Request to Defer Dimona Inspection

Discussion:

We are concerned that delaying rejection of the Israeli proposal to defer inspection of the Dimona reactor sets in motion a dangerous drift toward a turning point in the history of the Near East, namely a decision by Israel to develop nuclear weapons.

1. Psychological Effect on the Israeli Leadership

The psychological effect on Israeli leadership of a US failure to react promptly could be damaging to our national security interests. While we do not consider Dimona an election issue, the timing of the Israel proposal suggests that Eshkol may. The absence of a swift, unambiguous reaction will confirm his belief and provide justification for his ascribing an overriding importance to domestic political considerations in Israel and strengthen his resistance to US pressures for inspection as the Israeli election approaches.

A greater danger, however, is that although Eshkol's proposal may be sincere, our failure to react promptly will provide the proponents of security through development of an independent deterrent with an opportunity to bring strong pressure on the Prime Minister. The division of Israeli leadership on the best course to assure Israel's security is not clear-cut. The theories of the independent deterrent and dependence upon foreign military support each have its supporters. Thus far, Eshkol has not shown a clear preference. He might, however, find pressures for a decision to go nuclear irresistible, assuming its justification is to assure the survival of the Jewish people. We can assume that the elements that helped create the present opportunity will not fail to press their advantage. An immediate, clear-cut rejection of the Israeli proposal, would bolster those wary of developing an independent deterrent, but every day that passes strengthens the hand of their opponents.

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- 2 -

2. Long-range US Prospects of Deterring Israel

Since Israel would not risk discovery of preparations to develop nuclear weapons, once embarked upon the nuclear weapons road, (evidence suggests the decision may already have been taken) it could well withstand any pressures for inspection we might bring to bear. Our major means of coercion are curtailment of military and economic aid. Israel, however, can survive and even flourish without our economic assistance. It has informed us it does not need major deliveries of military materiel (despite earlier heavy importuning) until November 1965, or nearly two years after the last Dimona inspection, ample time to develop a nuclear weapons making capability.

The only effective way to prevent Israel from embarking on a nuclear weapons course is not to permit an opportunity for such a decision to be implemented covertly. Failing this, the only chance for reprieve would be on terms offered by the independent deterrent school, and these would be high. To judge by experience and current indications, Israel would ask for high performance jet military airplanes and/or Pershing missiles. This would carry us far down the path of a Near East arms race, and at best would merely postpone the ultimate Israeli decision on a nuclear deterrent.

Recommendation:

That you draw on the foregoing to persuade Governor Harriman that our best chance for regaining the initiative on Dimona inspections situation is to reject Eshkol's proposal prior to the November 3 elections.

PT: I see nothing magic in the November 3 date in this case. The argument for an early reply to Eshkol is sound, but I think it unlikely that a delay of a week or two more will make any significant difference. Anyway, Komer does not think the President will be willing to be able to focus on this for a while.

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Asyl.

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

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