

November 15, 1961
Letter, Howard Furnas, Office of Special Assistant to Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Outer Space, to Dwight Ink, Atomic Energy Commission

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Summary:

Furnas writes about Department of State concerns that Israel may pursue a nuclear weapons program once the Dimona reactor is in operation.

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Dear Dwight:

You will recall that Deputy Under Secretary Johnson spoke to you briefly a week or so ago about the Department's concern over possible Israeli activities in the nuclear field.

The background of this matter, as you no doubt know, is that last summer we arranged for an unpublicized visit to the new Israeli nuclear power reactor at Dimona by two eminent American scientists. Their report indicated for the time being at least the reactor seemed designed for the peaceful purposes the Israelis claimed for it.

There remains, however, in this Department a concern which is supported by the Intelligence Community (for example, NIE 35-61, "The Outlook for Israel") that Israel may become interested in weapons production when the Dimona reactor goes into operation and a supply of fissionable material becomes available. According to NIE 35-61, an inhibiting factor in a possible Israeli weapons program would be lack of weapons designs. While such designs might be obtained in other ways, it is conceivable that the Israelis might attempt to acquire them through clandestine means in the United States. The assurances of the Israeli Government as to its present peaceful intentions regarding use of the Dimona reactor notwithstanding, we feel the U.S. Government must be alert to the various implications of the foregoing.

As you are well aware, it is U.S. policy to oppose acquisition of independent national nuclear weapons capability by countries not now possessing such a capability. In order to follow carefully the progress of the Israelis in the nuclear

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field and to be alert to the possibility of the development of a military nuclear program, we intend to press the Israelis to arrange further open visits to Dimona by "neutral" scientists. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion assured President Kennedy of his agreement on this point when the two met last May. We believe it would be desirable, however, for additional precautionary steps to be taken. Appropriate discreet surveillance of Israeli scientists in a position to observe U.S. atomic energy installations would probably be wise. Specifically, surveillance of Dr. Israel Dostrovsky, who has been given a research and teaching grant at Brookhaven National Laboratory for the current academic year, would be desirable in the light of Dr. Dostrovsky's reputation as one of the individuals primarily responsible for guiding Israel's atomic energy program.

We have, through the Department's representation in the U.S. Intelligence Board, made known our concern that appropriate agencies of the U.S. Government be alert to the security considerations mentioned above. We would also appreciate your taking whatever action is appropriate within the Atomic Energy Commission to see that proper precautions are observed.

Sincerely yours,

Howard Furnas
Deputycc: NEA - Mr. Crawford
INR - Mr. McAfee

S/AE: HFurnas: reg

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