

January 31, 1961

**Department of State Memorandum of Conversation,
'Ambassador Reid's Review of His Conversation with
President Kennedy'**

Citation:

"Department of State Memorandum of Conversation, 'Ambassador Reid's Review of His Conversation with President Kennedy'", January 31, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, NARA, RG 59, Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Office of Near Eastern Affairs (NESA/NEA), Records of the Director, 1960-1963, box 5, Tel Aviv - 1961. Originally published in Avner Cohen and William Burr, eds., National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book #547 (April 21, 2016).

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Summary:

Days after his inauguration, President Kennedy met with Ogden Reid, who had just resigned as US ambassador to Israel, for a comprehensive briefing on US-Israel relations, including the problem of the Dimona nuclear reactor.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

This document consists of 2 pages.

Number 3 of 3 copies, Series A

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: January 31, 1961

SUBJECT: Ambassador Reid's Review of His Conversation with President Kennedy

PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Ogden R. Reid
NE - William L. Hamilton
NE - William R. Crawford, Jr.

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(Ambassador Reid spent forty-five minutes in the President's office, during which the President excused himself to see another visitor for a few minutes in an adjoining room. It is my impression that the President permitted Ambassador Reid to develop the conversation as he chose, expressing views of his own infrequently, if at all).

Peace with the Arabs: Ben-Gurion has some power to maneuver on his own initiative, and would make reciprocal concessions in order to obtain a "de facto peace". This would have to be achieved on a very secret basis, the participants communicating only through the most carefully guarded channels. Any U.S. contribution would have to be on a basis of direct contact with Ben-Gurion. He informed the President of Ben-Gurion's support for the type of contact known as the "Anderson mission," which he explained in some detail when the President indicated he had not previously heard of this effort.

USSR Relations with the UAR: Ambassador Reid said he told the President that the UAR's dependence on the USSR can be expressed in terms of three "screws" that the latter can twist as it wishes to bring pressure on Egypt. These are (1) cotton purchases, (2) arms supply, and (3) the Aswan Dam and other economic aid. The West could reduce Soviet influence if it could substitute Western effort for some or all of these activities.

Israel's New Atomic Reactor: The Ambassador told the President he believes we can accept at face value Ben-Gurion's assurances that the reactor is to be devoted to peaceful purposes. An inspection of the reactor by a qualified

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United States scientist can be arranged when the United States wishes, if it is done on a secret basis. Overt examination and announcement of the result to the world will require greater effort, but could be done. That Ben-Gurion had been less than candid with the United States, Ambassador Reid told the President, traced to his preoccupation with security. Reid suspects that very few people in Israel knew of the development's true character, possibly not even the Foreign Minister, Golda Meir, until it hit the headlines.

Arms Balance in the Israel-Arab Complex: Ambassador Reid apparently made a detailed presentation of the Israel case for more sophisticated weaponry to protect itself against surprise air attack by the UAR. The Ambassador accepts the Israel estimate that its population centers are only four minutes from Damascus by supersonic aircraft. Ambassador Reid urged United States consideration of ballistic missiles for Israel and more specific assurances of our willingness to help in case of invasion, as moves that will contribute to stability in the Middle East. He told the President of our offer, now outstanding, of early-warning equipment, which Israel is studying. He suggested that we try to shorten delivery times for these items.

Aid to Africa: Ambassador Reid reviewed at some length Israel's technical assistance efforts with the new states of Africa, apparently giving them a high rating for effectiveness, and suggesting that the United States would be well advised to keep Israel in mind as offering an adjunct to Western efforts in Africa. He told the President that Ben-Gurion is now disappointed he did not mention Israel's African program when they met last year.

State of the Union and Inaugural Messages: Ambassador Reid told the President he had been struck by the phrase on accepting "the risk of leadership" and the President's reference to time not necessarily being on our side. He said the President had told him his omission of the Middle East in his messages had not been deliberate or an evidence of his indifference to the problems of the area. On the contrary, the President, according to Ambassador Reid, said he is very much interested in ways in which peace might be achieved.

The Lavon Affair: According to Ambassador Reid, the President expressed interest in the Lavon affair, and asked the Ambassador who he thinks would succeed to power if Ben-Gurion were to leave the scene. Ambassador Reid had replied Eshkol is the name most frequently mentioned, and had expressed the personal opinion that Moshe Dayan, former Chief of Staff, now Minister of Agriculture and long a Ben-Gurion protege, would refuse to serve in a successor cabinet which did not include Ben-Gurion. Abba Eban, former Ambassador to the United States and now Minister of Education, would have more difficulty making up his mind, but, as a tribute to Ben-Gurion might also choose to refuse a cabinet appointment. Ambassador Reid indicated he had told the President that Eban has made reasonably successful efforts to acquire a common touch, but still does not have the political sex appeal of Moshe Dayan.

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