

**February 2, 1961**

**Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs  
to Secretary of State, 'President's Suggestion re:  
Israeli Reactor'**

**Citation:**

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<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/123812>

**Summary:**

Concerned about a recent visit to Cairo by Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semenov and the possibility that the Soviets might exploit Egyptian concerns over Dimona, President Kennedy pressed State to arrange an inspection visit at Dimona by a US scientist.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

SECRET

This document consists of 2  
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Series A.

TO : The Secretary

THROUGH: S/S *JS*

FROM : NEA - G. Lewis Jones *JS*

SUBJECT: President's Suggestions re Israeli Reactor

1443  
FEB 2 1961

Discussion:

We share the President's concern over the visit of Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Semenov to Cairo and the possibility that he might exploit Egyptian concern over Israel's nuclear activities. We note in this connection that Molotov at the IAEA in Vienna (Tab A) professes not to be preoccupied with the Israeli reactor situation but, of course, this does not mean that the Soviets will not exploit the matter to curry favor with the Arabs.

On several occasions United States representatives have stressed to UAR representatives here and in Cairo the peaceful nature of Israel's atomic energy program as presently projected. You will recall, for example, that this question was discussed in Ambassador Reinhardt's conversation with Nasser on January 21 (Tab B). We doubt that it is necessary to call in the UAR Ambassador urgently to reiterate our views, particularly since it appears that Semenov has already left Cairo. However, we believe that Ambassador Kamel's initial call on you, scheduled for 2:30 p.m. next Tuesday, will afford a fine opportunity for you, as representing the new administration, to reaffirm to the Ambassador our views on Israel's atomic energy activities. This item will be included in the briefing memorandum being prepared for you.

*A* *L* In anticipation of your press conference we are preparing appropriate comment on a contingency basis concerning Israel's atomic program. While a public reiteration of our confidence in Israel's assurances concerning the peaceful purposes of its atomic energy program might be useful in some respects, on balance it would appear preferable to avoid voluntary comment or stimulating discussion of this subject for the following reasons: a) world-wide publicity with respect to Israel's atomic energy activities has happily subsided; b) Prime Minister Ben-Gurion states that in accordance with our request he will permit a qualified American scientist to visit the new reactor installation but only after public attention in Israel and outside Israel has died down; and c) voluntary comment on this subject might stimulate from correspondents friendly to Israel a series of questions concerning Arab-Israel matters from whose publicity Israel would appear in a more favorable light. Until we have determined what steps we wish to take concerning Arab-Israel matters public inquiries and answers would not be helpful.

SECRET

- 2 -

*B*  
~~As you know,~~ Ambassador Reid is no longer in Tel Aviv and our Charge d'Affaires is not really well positioned to press further for the early visit of one of our representatives to the Israeli reactor installation. Moreover, Ben-Gurion and his cabinet have resigned. While they are continuing on a caretaker basis they are thoroughly pre-occupied with local politics. Under these circumstances I recommend that we meet the President's suggestion by allowing me at a very early opportunity to re-emphasize to Ambassador Harman the importance of permitting a visit. You then may wish to mention it again when the Ambassador makes a courtesy call on you, which he has requested for some time after February 12.

Recommendations:

That with reference to the President's suggestions you respond:

1. In view of current domestic political preoccupations in Israel, we are re-emphasizing to Ambassador Harman here the importance of an early visit by a representative of a friendly power to inspect the Israeli reactor installation.
2. That you are prepared if a question is asked, to comment publicly at your press conference ~~to~~ <sup>Monday</sup> concerning the peaceful character of the Israeli reactor. On balance for the reasons cited above we would prefer to avoid a new round of publicity.
3. That Israel's atomic development was discussed by Ambassador Reinhardt on January 21 with Nasser and that you will speak to UAR Ambassador Kamel about it in reassuring terms when he calls next Tuesday.

Attachments:

Tab A - Despatch No. 707 from Vienna  
Tab B - Telegram 1292 from Cairo

Clearance:

*xx*  
S/AE - Mr. Farley

*xx*  
NEA:NE:AHMeyer:av  
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*Sir: How do you wish to convey the foregoing to the President?*

*Telephone?*

*to Goodposter ← Memo?*

*Stoessel to Goodposter?*