

February 26, 1961

**Department of State Memorandum of Conversation,
'U.S.-Israeli Relations - The Dimona Reactor'**

Citation:

"Department of State Memorandum of Conversation, 'U.S.-Israeli Relations - The Dimona Reactor'", February 26, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RG 59, NES/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). <https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/123818>

Summary:

Assistant Secretary G. Lewish Jones reports on a conversation with Teddy Kollek about arranging a US visit to Dimona.

Credits:

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

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

NEA: Leta Jones: hnh

CONFIDENTIAL

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: February 26, 1961

SUBJECT:

US-Israeli Relations - Dimona Reactor

PARTICIPANTS:

Mr. Theodore Kollek, Director General, Prime Minister's Office,
Israel
G. Lewis Jones, Assistant Secretary for NEA

COPIES TO:

Note: Teddie Kollek has been my friend since before Israel came into being. We have kept in touch with each other through the years and when I was in Cairo he twice came to Cyprus to meet with me. He is a behind-the-scenes figure well known to all those dealing with Israel and has been the pipeline to Ben Gurion for successive American Ambassadors to Israel.

On February 22 Ambassador Harman arranged at his residence a small dinner party consisting of the two Harmans, my wife and myself and Kollek. This was a social occasion but the Israelis are not adverse to talking business at such times. I knew that Kollek was bringing a message from Ben Gurion about the reactor but I decided to let him take the initiative if he wanted to do so. He did not; we talked only about the general political situation in Israel. I told Kollek I hoped to see him again.

On February 26 Kollek came alone to my house and we talked for over an hour with no one else present. The following emerged:

Reactor

Kollek brought up this subject saying that he had noted my reticence on the previous occasion. I said that newly independent states are highly sensitive regarding matters touching their sovereignty and I was waiting for him to speak first.

CONFIDENTIAL

INFORMATION COPY

Teddie said he was present when Harman's telegram reporting his talk with the Secretary on February 13 had been received by Ben Gurion. BG's first reaction had been to wonder why, when the Secretary raised the question of immigration into Israel, Harman had not said that if the USSR would let the Jews go Israel would take them all in and "draw the consequences".

As regards the visit to the Dimona reactor Kollek said he saw no reason why this should not take place "during the month of March" whether or not new elections are to be held in Israel. In March Ben Gurion would still head the caretaker government.

I replied that from the point of view of US-Israeli relations the visit could not take place too soon. I said that I would be interested in his ideas as to the level of the visit. I felt certain that Israel would want to reassure the world at large regarding Dimona perhaps inviting some of those attending the Geneva IAEA meeting to come and see Dimona. However, such a publicized visit might take a little time to arrange and conceivably would have political implications for the GOI. I thought that initially the need was for the US expert (not necessarily a "name brand") to visit Dimona quietly at an early date.

Kollek said he agreed and added that Israel had in mind in coming months to give a Life photographer the run of Dimona so that some pictures would appear in Life magazine. He recognized, however, the importance of an unpublicized visit by a US expert and reiterated he was certain this could be arranged "during March". (I had the impression that Kollek's view of the importance of the Dimona furor has been accentuated by his talks with leading American Jews). I told Kollek that as a friend I thought he should know that suspicions of Israel's intentions in the nuclear field were heightened by the fact that Israel's nuclear program was conducted by the Israeli Ministry of Defense - Ben Gurion being Defense Minister. Kollek readily took the point. He said that using Defense was a great administrative convenience to the GOI since Defense had superior security and was subject to a high degree of control. He said "Do you think it would be better if we turned the responsibility over to the Weizmann Institute?". I said that from the public relations point of view I was convinced that this would be a good move: it would damp down many suspicions. The Weizmann Institute had already asked for IAEA experts: by giving Dimona the same status as the small reactor suspicions would be allayed. Kollek replied: "I think this can be arranged".

Note: In speaking of the Ministry of Defense Kollek said that this agency of the GOI was conducting a number of "development projects" including weapons, communications equipment, explosives "and missiles".

Comment: I believe that Kollek would not have been so sure about the invitation "in March" if he did not have Ben Gurion's backing. I will consult with S/AE, Mr. Farley, with regard to the individual who might accept such an invitation.

CONFIDENTIAL

INFORMATION COPY