

February 12, 1962
Department of State Memorandum of Conversation,
'Israel's Atomic Energy Program'

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British response to State Department reply regarding controls over Israel nuclear program.

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PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Denis J. Speares, First Secretary, British Embassy

(1) NE - Nicholas G. Thacher

NE - William R. Crawford, Jr.

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Mr. Thacher handed Mr. Speares the Department's reply (attached for selected posts) to the U.K. Foreign Office study of control over nuclear energy programs in the Near East which had been left with Deputy Assistant Secretary Grant by Mr. Greenhill on February 14. Mr. Thacher summarized the main elements of the Department's reply as follows:

1. Our reply stresses the view that we fully agree on the desirability of bringing Near East nuclear development under IAEA control.

2. There are, however, two features of the IAEA system which would make an exercise to "pressure" Israel into its immediate acceptance of doubtful utility. First, both partners to a bilateral atomic energy agreement must be brought under IAEA controls, to a degree, if these are accepted by one. Israel's fuel elements for Dimona will come from France. For Israel to be brought in under the IAEA system, France would also have to be willing to have the IAEA inspect irradiated elements upon their return. At present, it seems most unlikely France would accept this. Second, IAEA controls do not become operative until a reactor goes critical. It is obviously the period before Dimona goes critical that is most worrisome as regards Arab reaction.

3. Despite these short-run obstacles, the acceptance of IAEA controls should be our objective. Pending acceptance, we share the Foreign Office view on the desirability of interim, ad hoc inspection measures to satisfy ourselves and the world-at-large as to Israel's intentions.

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4. We have very high regard for Canada's technical competence and objectivity. However, we doubt Canadian inspection of Israel's nuclear facilities would serve a purpose very different from U.S. inspection. Canada has been closely associated with Britain and the U.S. in the IAEA. If what is desired is "neutral" inspection that will convince the Arabs and others, we think there would be other countries who have the technical qualifications who would be regarded as more "neutral" than Canada and thus better serve our common objective.

5. It is with this in mind that we have had quiet discussions with Sweden with a view to that country's accepting the role of first neutral, open visitor to Dimona. These discussions have not yet been conclusive, but the Swedes have not appeared opposed in principle to undertake this role.

6. If arrangements for an open, neutral visit are not completed in the fairly near future, we are willing to consider a further secret visit by U.S. scientists.

7. We are very grateful that the Foreign Office has shared its views with us. We would be glad to have Foreign Office comments on our reply. We look forward to continued close consultation on this issue.

Mr. Speares expressed appreciation for the Department's reply which will be conveyed to the Foreign Office. He noted that Canada had been referred to in the Foreign Office study because it seems the country best qualified in all respects to undertake the inspection role. In addition to its technical competence and reasonably central position in Arab-Israel affairs, its relationship with the U.K. is such as to ensure full sharing of information gained.

Mr. Thacher reiterated the view that, in the latter respect, Canadian inspection would not accomplish anything not already obtainable through U.S. visits.

Enclosure: (to NEA, NE, S/AE, London, Ottawa, Tel Aviv)

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The Department of State is grateful for the careful consideration given by the Foreign Office to the dangers of a nuclear race among countries of the Near East set out in the Embassy's communication of February 14. The Department fully shares the Foreign Office conviction that an adequate safeguards system for nuclear reactor development in that area is essential.

2. We concur in the desirability of working for introduction of the IAEA inspection system into the Near East countries and acceptance by Israel would seem to be the logical starting point. However, two significant objections can be foreseen: One is Israel's clear opposition to submission to IAEA controls until these are generally accepted by other nations, and the other is that, under IAEA procedures, both parties to any agreement would probably have to agree to IAEA supervision. The Israel bilateral is with France, and it seems doubtful France would agree to inspection by the IAEA of irradiated elements after their return to French soil. A further problem, recognized by the Foreign Office, is that IAEA inspection, even if accepted, would not commence until the Dimona reactor goes critical, some two years hence, and it is in the intervening period that Arab suspicions and the probability of sharp Arab reactions are likely to be greatest. While we wish ultimately to see all nuclear reactors under IAEA inspection, we doubt Israel's present objections can be overcome regardless of the amount of suasion used, and thus question the value of the sort of immediate, intense effort envisaged by the Foreign Office. However, in forthcoming renegotiation of the United States-Israel atoms-for-peace bilateral, which covers the reactor at Nabi Rubin, we will make a strong effort to obtain Israel's agreement to transfer to the IAEA of the specific inspection function now allowed to the United States. In any case, we would propose to make clear that the IAEA system is ultimately the one we believe should exercise safeguards functions with regard to peaceful uses of atomic energy in the Near East area and that, as the IAEA system evolves and gains additional adherents, we would expect Israel to accept its supervision.

3. However, ad hoc inspection that will satisfy both ourselves and the world at large as to Israel's actions in the period before the Dimona reactor is completed seems imperative. As to suitable interim, neutral inspectors, we doubt Canada is well qualified since it is closely identified with the West in the IAEA. We think the Swiss, the Swedes, or some other Scandinavian country would be better suited to provide the desired

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"neutral" confirmation of Israel's peaceful intentions. We have already had some discussion with the Swedes about this and hope to be able to work out something pursuant to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's May 1961 assurances to President Kennedy.

4. A further complication to the introduction of IAEA controls has been the UAR attitude toward these. It has voted against the IAEA system at every step. With the object of reducing its suspicions and, ultimately, of winning its acceptance of IAEA controls after these have been accepted by Israel, we intend to encourage the fullest possible working relationship between the UAR and the IAEA in other matters.

5. We are asking the West Germans for a report on the status of their present dealings with the UAR. As the Foreign Office is no doubt aware, the Germans have repeatedly assured us that they have no intention of assisting the UAR in reactor development without adequate safeguards.

6. Lacking early arrangement of an open, neutral visit to Dimona, the United States is prepared to consider another secret visit to Dimona, roughly on the one-year anniversary of our last visit in May 1961.

7. We will welcome continued close consultation with the United Kingdom on all aspects of this issue. We will keep the Embassy in Washington informed of our progress and of the reply we received from the Germans to the approach described in (5).

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