

August 16, 2001

**Interview with Tzvi Tzur by Boaz Lev Tov at the
Rabin Memorial Center, Tel Aviv**

Citation:

"Interview with Tzvi Tzur by Boaz Lev Tov at the Rabin Memorial Center, Tel Aviv", August 16, 2001, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Rabin Memorial Center. Obtained by Adam Raz. <https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/134926>

Original Language:

Hebrew

Contents:

Transcript - Hebrew

Translation - English

ראיון עם צבי צור – תל-אביב

מראיין: בועז לב טוב

תאריך: 16 באוגוסט 2001

מפענחת: אסנת בראל

קטע על 67' והגרעין מתוך הריאיון עם צור.

ב. השאלה השנייה שנוגעת למה שאני רוצה להמשיך אתו. הוא מסית אותנו קצת, בעצם רוב מה שתיארת עד עכשיו זה היחסים עם צרפת. בעצם פה הנושא של הצידוד מצרפת, כל ההיבט הצרפתי, על הפרשה עם הצרפתים. בשנים האלה כשאתה עוזר שר הביטחון כבר, הולך ועולה המעמד של הקשרים עם ארה"ב. זה נושא בפני עצמו, שגם בו בטוח אתה היית מעורב בהרבה דברים. הייתי רוצה להתייחס לדברים מסוימים שגם קשורים ליצחק רבין כשגריר. אבל, מה שמלווה את הנושא האמריקאי ביחסים עם אמריקה ומאפיל אולי על השנים האלה, זה באמת הסוגיה הקשה הגרעינית, שכל הזמן, זה מתחיל עם קנדי ונמשך עם ג'ונסון. באמת הופך להיות משהו שמפריע אולי להתקרבות המלאה עם ארה"ב. וכל הזמן איך מגיבים בארה"ב. אלה דברים שאני בטוח שאתה טיפלת בהם. אני מבין שהיכולת לך לספר היא מוגבלת. אבל בגבולות שנראה לך בכל זאת. וזה מתחיל בסוגיה הזאת של ערב ששת הימים, וזה עולה ממספר כיוונים. זה גם מופיע כבר, אבנר כהן כתב את זה במאמר, שמעון פרס כתב את זה בזיכרונותיו אפילו בנושא מסוים, ויובל נאמן סיפר את זה בראיון. וזה השאלה שאנחנו ערב ששת הימים, יש בכל זאת חרדה די רצינית. תוכנית הגרעין, לפי כל הסימנים, עדיין במצב די התחלתי. ובכל זאת עולה הרעיון לעשות איזה שהוא איתות על היכולת המסוימת הגרעינית שיש לנו, כדי לשכנע את הצד השני שבכלל לא כדאי להם, מה שנקרא, להתעסק. יובל נאמן מספר שזה עשה, ופרס מספר שזה עלה. זה עלה בתחילת תקופת ההמתנה, ואשכול הוריד את זה. ואחר כך שמעון פרס מספר, כשדיין נכנס לתפקיד שר הביטחון, הוא אישית, הוא מספר, בא אליו, מתוך המעורבות הגבוהה בתפקיד של שמעון פרס בשלב הזה, והציע לו את זה עוד פעם. והוא ? אומר: בעצם יכולנו ככה למנוע את המלחמה, אם היינו עושים את זה. אתה יודע

צ. כן, זה אני כן בקי.

ב. אני בטוח שאתה בקי.

צ. לזה הייתי אחראי באותה תקופה, ברור שאני בקי. לא יודע רק מה להגיד לך. אתה שאלת שתי שאלות. אחת על ארה"ב.

ב. על ארה"ב נדבר בהמשך. אני רוצה להתחיל בזה, זה גם קשור לארה"ב. כל הזמן נשאלת השאלה מה להגיב ? לארה"ב ולדרישות שלה בתחום הגרעיני

צ. אני רוצה לומר לך כאן, זה קשור ולא קשור. אנחנו התחלנו לקבל ציוד מהאמריקאים ב-1961, קיבלנו את האישור הראשון להוקים. ההנמקה האמריקאית הייתה: אנחנו ניתן לכם ציוד להגנה פסיבית. ההוקים, שזה היה בשבילנו דבר אדיר, מערכת נשק סופר מתקדמת של אותם הימים, קיבלנו מהאמריקאים את האישור ב-1961 והזה הגיע ארצה, אני חושב ב-1963. זה הגיע ארצה והתארגנו כאן עם זה. הם נתנו לנו כל הזמן נשק בלי כל קשר לנשק גרעיני, במשורה. הסיבה, לפי דעתי, בהחלט לא הנשק הגרעיני. לא שזה לא הוסיף באיזה שהוא מקום

..... אבל המדיניות של משרד החוץ האמריקאי הייתה פרו-ערבית בולטת. כוח הלובי היהודי היה בהתארגנות. זה לא היה מה שהוא היום, או מה שהוא היה לפני שנה. היום הוא גם כן קצת פחות. השלטון הוא שלטון יותר נפטי, יותר טקסני מאשר נוסח קלינטון. כלומר, היו שמה אנטי בולט לעזרה מסיבית לישראל. ונתנו במשורה, לאט לאט

כשהגענו לששת הימים, בלי כל קשר לנושא הגרעיני. דבר כזה לא מתארגן מהיום למחר. פתאום נותנים לך את כל המטוסים וכל דבר. קיבלנו מטוסים לפני. אבל כל מטוס, ה'סקייהוק' היית הולך ומנהל משא ומתן. מנהל משא ומתן עם השלטון, מנהל משא ומתן עם בחברה, מנהל משא ומתן עם הבנקים. אז הרי לא קיבלנו הכל חינם. זה היה תהליך איטי, זה התפתח לאט לאט

? ב. בזה אתה מטפל באופן מלא

צ. בזה אני מטפל באופן מלא. לכן אני מסביר לך, זו הערכה, זה לא ידיעה. אני לא חושב שהנושא הגרעיני קבע...את הקצב. הנושא הגרעיני לא הוסיף לנו כאן

ב. היה שלב בסתיו 1968 שג'ונסון לקראת הבחירות, ואז יש לחץ לחתום על אמנה. ואז הוא אומר: חמישים פנטומים מעוכבים באופן ברור ?

צ. נכון, אבל הבעיה הייתה למצוא את נוסחת הפלא שאפשר יהיה להשתמש בה. ואז המציאו את הנוסחה שאנחנו לא נהיה הראשונים טו פרודיוס את הנשק הגרעיני במזרח התיכון. וזו נוסחה שהאמריקאים קיבלו, והם חיים אתה עד היום. הם לא רוצים שתיגע בזה והם לא רוצים שתשנה אותה, הם לא רוצים שתבלבל את הראש, ואל תגיד שיש לך יותר ויש לך פחות. הם חיים טוב עם הנוסחה הזאת. זו נוסחה שנתפסה בתקופת גולדה-ג'ונסון, אולי אשכול לפני גולדה. וככה חיים מאז ועד היום. כמה זה השפיע על לתת יותר או פחות ? בוא נגיד שהגיוני לחשוב שקצת השפיע. אני לא חושב שזה קבע. גורמים אחרים פה קבעו. היחסים הקבועים עם מדינות הנפט, עמדת משרד החוץ אז, היא השתנתה במשך הזמן, אי התארגנותו של הלובי היהודי שלקח לו זמן להגיע לעוצמה שהוא הגיע אליה עם אפא"ק מאוחר יותר. הכל השפיע

...מה שפה אתה מספר על בוא ניתן התראה ל

? ב. איזה פיצוץ מבוקר

צ. זה בסך הכל קשקוש. שמעון פרס מאד אפשרי שהציע דבר כזה, ויכול להיות שמישהו אחר מילה. ואם היום יכניסו את תת-אלוף יאצה לבית-סוהר זה בגלל זה שהוא דיבר על דברים כאלה מיד אחרי ששת הימים. אבל אני לא חושב שהיה בזה את האמת. כשאני באתי למשרד היה לנו כבר מה שהיה לנו. זה לא היה לנו מה ש... אבל לא ידעת בדיוק אם יכולים לעשות עם זה הפגנה או לא

? ב. השאלה אם לא הלכו לברר מה מצבנו

צ. אני מיניתי ועדה, ובדיוק פה הסתבך יאצה. מיניתי ועדה של שני אנשים. הועדה לאנרגיה אטומית, ואת יאצה. שהיה ראש המו"פ

? ב. הוא מהצד של צה"ל

צ. נדמה לי שהוא היה ממשרד הביטחון, אבל יכול להיות שהצד של צה"ל. לבדוק בדיוק אם אפשר לעשות משהו, לא לעשות משהו. כמובן שדיברנו על ניסוי. בדקנו את הצד הטכני של העניין. לא בדקנו את הצד הפוליטי, שלא היה שום היגיון, לפי דעתי, לעשות אותו. אם שמעון פרס ברצינות הציע הצעה כזאת - זה נראה לי תמוה. הוא לא יכול היה להציע את זה למשה דיין, כי משה דיין לאחר שש שעות של מלחמה, כבר היינו אחרי המלחמה

ב. לא, הוא אומר שמיד בראשית יוני, עוד ל

Interview with Tzvi Tzur - Tel-Aviv

Interviewer: Boaz Lev Tov

Date: August 16, 2001

Decoder: Osnat Barel

1967 and nuclear [weapons] from the interview with Tzur

[transcript begins mid-interview]

Boaz: The second question is regarding what I would like to proceed with. It's a bit of a deviation, most of what you described so far is in fact the relations with France. It's the matter of the equipment from France, the entire French aspect, the French affair. During these years, with you as the Deputy Minister of Defense, the status of Israeli-American relations is on the rise. This is an issue by itself, in which you must have been also deeply involved. I'd like to talk about several issues that also have something to do with Yitzhak Rabin as an ambassador. However, the tough nuclear issue accompanies relations with the United States and even overshadows them, all the time, beginning with Kennedy and continues with Johnson. It really becomes a sort of an obstacle to get fully close to the US. In addition, there's the matter of constant responses from the US. These are issues I'm certain you've dealt with. I understand that what you can tell me is limited. Nevertheless, in the limits you think are possible. It starts with this issue of the eve of the Six-Day war, and it comes from several directions. It has already been published, Avner Cohen wrote it in an article, Shimon Peres wrote it in his memoirs even in a specific issue, and Yuval Ne'eman talked about it during an interview. And this is the question, we're on the eve of the Six-Day war, there's still some pretty serious anxiety. The nuclear program, by all indications, is in a pretty initial stage. And still the idea to make our particular nuclear capability known comes up, as a way to convince the other side they shouldn't, as they say, mess with us. Yuval Ne'eman says it did [happen], Peres says it came up. It came up in the beginning of the waiting period, but Eshkol dismissed it. Then, Peres says that when Dayan became the Minister of Defense, he himself, he says, came to him, as Peres was highly involved in the position at that stage, and offered it once more. And he says: We could've actually prevented the war, by doing this. Do you know?

Tzvi: Yes, I'm well versed in that.

Boaz: I'm sure you are.

Tzvi: I was responsible for that at the time, of course I'm versed. I don't know what to tell you. You asked two questions. One about the US.

Boaz: We'll talk about the US later. I want to begin with this, it is also related to the US. The question keeps coming up, how should we respond to the US and its demands regarding the nuclear issue?

Tzvi: I want to tell you here, there is a connection and yet there isn't. We started getting equipment from the Americans in 1961, we got the first approval for the Hawks [missiles]. The American logic was: we'll give you equipment for passive defense. The Hawks, which were a great thing for us, a super-advanced weapon system during that time, we got the clearance from the Americans in 1961 and it came here to Israel in 1963, I believe. It came to Israel and we organized it here. They constantly gave us weapons without anything to do with nuclear weapons, sparingly. The reason, as I believe, is definitely not the nuclear weapon. It did help in some way... But the US State Department's policy was noticeably pro-Arab. The Jewish Lobby force was still forming. It isn't what it is today, or what it was a year ago. Today it's also a little less [prominent]. The administration is more about oil, more Texas-like than Clinton-like. Meaning there was a noticeable aversion from helping Israel massively. They gave sparingly, slowly. When we got to the Six-Day war, without anything to do with the nuclear issue. Such a thing isn't one you organize from one day to the next. Suddenly they give you the fighter jets and everything. We got jets before. But every jet, such as the Skyhawk, you would go and have a negotiation. You would negotiate with the administration, with the company, with the banks. So we didn't get everything for free. It was a slow process, it developed slowly.

Boaz: You've handled that fully?

Tzvi: I've handled that fully. That's why I'm explaining to you that it's an estimation, not a certain knowledge. I don't think that the nuclear issue has set the tone. The nuclear issue hasn't helped us here...

Boaz: There was a point in Fall 1968 when Johnson was heading towards the elections, and there was some pressure to sign the treaty. And then he says clearly that [the arrival of] 50 Phantoms [jets] are delayed?

Tzvi: That's right, the problem however was to find the miracle formula that would allow us to use it. And then they came up with the formula where we won't be the first ones to produce a nuclear weapon in the middle east. And it's a formula that the Americans accepted, and they live with it to this day. They don't want you to touch it or change it, they don't want you to make a mess, to tell that you have more or that you have less. They live well with this formula. It was established during Golda-Johnson, maybe Eshkol before Golda. And that's how they live to this day. How much did it affect the number [of weapons] given? Let's say that it makes sense it affected it a little bit. I don't think it was the main factor. Other factors were greater. The constant relations with the oil countries, the stance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs changed over time, the Jewish Lobby that wasn't organized yet and took a while to achieve the impact it had with AIPAC later. All of those affected. What you're talking about here, "let's give a warning for..."

Boaz: A controlled explosion?

Tzvi: That's nonsense altogether. It's very possible that Shimon Peres offered such a thing, and it's possible someone else did it. And if today they'll put 'Tat-Aluf' [rank equivalent to brigadier-general] Yitza [Yitzhak Yaakov] in prison it's because he spoke of such things after the Six-Day war. But I don't think that was the truth. When I came into office we already had what we had. We didn't have what... But you didn't exactly know if it's possible to make a demonstration out of it.

Boaz: The question is whether they didn't go to check our status?

Tzvi: I appointed a committee, and that's exactly where Yitza got in trouble. I appointed a two-man committee. The Atomic Energy Commission and Yitza who was the head of Research and Development in the Ministry of Defense.

Boaz: Was he on the IDF's side?

Tzvi: I think he was from the Ministry of Defense, but it's possible he was on the IDF's side. [The committee was to] check exactly if it's possible to do anything, not to actually do it. Of course we discussed an experiment. We checked the technical side of the issue. We didn't check the political side, as there was no logic, I believe, to actually do it. If Shimon Peres seriously made such an offer - I find it odd. He couldn't have offered it to Moshe Dayan, because after six hours of war, it was already behind us.

Boaz: No, he says that it was right at the start of June, even before the war?

Tzvi: That seems ridiculous. If he says it - let him say it.

Boaz: Don't you find it serious?

Tzvi: It couldn't have been serious. We would've destroyed everything we had.

Boaz: The whole ambiguity?

Tzvi: We would've been hurt badly. No one would believe a thing we say. And it's true that we've checked. We've checked if we could even do anything. And Yitza says that he was a part of a committee, one he says I appointed, but he had the authority and we performed the experiment. That has never happened. When I appointed the committee on Monday, the war has already started. In the evening we already knew there was no Egypt.

Boaz: Wasn't it relevant?

Tzvi: To whom was it relevant to do it? It's a simple logic of things. I don't know why Yitza chattered, that's why he's arrested today, unnecessarily, he didn't do anything major. Only the fact that he's telling it.

Boaz: Are you saying, not only did he get in trouble, but it was over something that never really happened?

Tzvi: A. It didn't happen. B. He's telling a story that if it got published today would hurt us just as much. That's the stupidity of it all. Anyway, I don't think there was

anything here. There wasn't anything and we couldn't have done a lot either. As a result, we got to all sorts of conclusions and we invested many funds in order to create such an option. I'm not talking about creating a weapon that would knock the world. I'm talking right now about an option of an experiment that someone would understand, then take us seriously. Those days we didn't even have that option.

Boaz: For emergencies?

Tzvi: In case such a problem arose. We could've taken, supposedly, some wires, connect them and blow up something in the desert... Today, even then there was... You could've done it underground. The whole world knows you did it because of the... work.

Boaz: Like Pakistan and India?

Tzvi: Yes, but not doing anything... So these stories, Yuval likes to talk about it, and Yitza talked about it. The whole thing, I believe, is very exaggerated. I also don't think that Avner Cohen wrote such a thing.

Boaz: No okay, because in the article...

Tzvi: I read the book.

Boaz: Not in the book. In another article I read.

Tzvi: He insists that someone there told [him].

Boaz: Yes.

Tzvi: Yuval told him. Because Yuval talked to him, I know. It fits Yuval to say that.

Boaz: Or that Shimon Peres said?

Tzvi: In retrospect, Shimon Peres wouldn't have said that, years after the fact. It doesn't fit Shimon Peres.

Boaz: Anyways, there's no doubt about the importance of the years you've dealt with this. It's something you're dealing with from A to Z, you organized this entire system. Do you work in this instance with direct coordination with Eshkol?

Tzvi: No, with Moshe Dayan. Not many Ministers were responsible for this, only the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense. The Minister of Defense didn't show deep interest in it, while Eshkol actually showed very deep interest. Golda showed interest.

Boaz: Dayan didn't?

Tzvi: Dayan didn't.

Boaz: He didn't show too much of an interest, or did he just not care? Was he interested in the bottom line?

Tzvi: He didn't think it was practical, and he didn't think it was needed that day. If you're taking care of it, then take care of it.

Boaz: Was it also involved with many small details and committees?

Tzvi: No, but a lot of coordination, mainly on the political side of the issue.

Boaz: There's still a struggle. You need Dayan, because when there's American pressure, and again that's on the political level, not on the operational-technological level. In the political level there's at the time a strong American pressure, in 1968/9, until things really settle down with this formula you describe. There's a lot of deliberation, also inside the government, even ministers who are close to Golda. And to Eshkol before, I'm relating to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Aba Even and Yigal Alon, and later mainly Yigal Alon and Galili. They're not too enthusiastic about it on a basic level.

Tzvi: Golda wasn't on this side either. Golda was very assertive, very cautious. We didn't have any quarrels with Golda. We didn't have any quarrels with Eshkol. We did have a little bit with Aba Even. But there wasn't... he had an opinion, a clear and known opinion, and here there weren't... there weren't that many discussions as you might think.

Boaz: There was some dramatic discussion where Galili and Alon pressured us to agree to sign the treaty to limit atomic development, in return for some very large strategic compensation. There's a meeting with you and Golda. And then Dayan starts the meeting telling Golda Meir stories, even before the meeting, a series of horrible stories about the cruelty of the Syrian military, torture and things like that. To

create the appropriate atmosphere. Was she like that, when she arrived?

Tzvi: I don't remember. But Moshe Dayan's stance was clear the entire time.

Boaz: He supported it?

Tzvi: Yes, and also Golda and Eshkol.

Boaz: And the fact that Galili and Alon and Even...?

Tzvi: Okay. But they always had other thoughts on these objections. Since it's their side, but we're on our side. But basically if they were responsible, it wouldn't have happened differently. If Yigal Alon was responsible - I don't think [it would've happened differently].

Boaz: You don't think?

Tzvi: No.

Boaz: And to try and convince them, show them how things are?

Tzvi: Alright, that we did, for sure. There was always some quarrel. And I wondered how one clear day Golda asked me to meet with Shimshon Shapira who was the Minister of Justice, who was highly regarded by her and very close to her, a strong character. She tells me: He doesn't know a thing, talk to him, and take him with you to Dimona.

Boaz: He doesn't know anything?

Tzvi: I don't know if he knew anything or if he didn't, but let's assume he didn't. I took him to Dimona. And then for years he would've asked me repeatedly: Why did you suddenly remember to take me to Dimona?

Boaz: He also didn't know why?

Tzvi: No. I told him: Listen, Golda asked, what's so complicated? He was really close to Golda. He was her close advisor. It seemed natural to me that she'd want one of her closest advisors to understand what they're talking about. I remember we rode to Dimona together.

Boaz: And was he convinced?

Tzvi: He was always a hawk, Shimshon Shapira. He was a hawk.

Boaz: Didn't he have any deliberations?

Tzvi: Not that I remember.

Boaz: You're saying you don't remember a big struggle as has been described in this area? Do you think that Golda and Eshkol basically [didn't have any deliberations] too?

Tzvi: There was always some quarrel, but I don't think the word 'struggle' fits here. It was a natural debate. Maybe today if the subject, if anyone let the subject arise, it probably doesn't arise anywhere. But if it was allowed to arise - there would be quarrel.

Boaz: Is it an existing fact today? Were you still in development phases?

Tzvi: You can let go and get the whole world, what do I know, get the peace treaty, let's say. But it doesn't work like this anymore. We're too tangled up in our own story. Today even you can't be sure if you don't need it. What do you know?

Boaz: Generally speaking, are those years of development, of progress?

Tzvi: The problem around these things, wasn't that you woke up in the morning and say: Let's start debating. It's true that the Americans always pressured [us], but there was a formula and it was known that the Americans know and accept it in silence. Where did the problems arise? When there were operative problems that we had to decide about. We had to get Uranium. After all, we don't have Uranium. Where do you get Uranium? Uranium is not a commodity you get on the market. You have to smuggle it from South Africa. You have to go to South Africa, negotiate with them, promise them the earth, and find some miracle formula they would accept. It's a problem to make a deal with South Africa and so on. Or if you need heavy water. Only the Norwegians have heavy water. So how do you get heavy water from the Norwegians? There were always debates around it, dictated by reality, for which you had to find an operative formula that would allow it to work. And the issues came up.

Boaz: Meaning, in the process itself?

Tzvi: In the process, there were many issues.

Boaz: And was the forum always very limited?

Tzvi: A very limited forum. There was knowledge, for example. We saved many years by getting information about a certain issue or another. But getting the knowledge isn't simply finding someone who'd give it to you. You had to obtain it. And look what happened to us when we weren't careful in the matter with Pollack. All sorts of things like that would sometimes go to the top, because of the sensitivity in the case of something happening. And there were many decisions here, very many of them. You can't even assess how many there were.

(Tape No. M)

Boaz: You're saying it was a series of very tough decisions that came up every time the issue was stopped?

Tzvi: It was brought up from time to time in a discussion on some forum that needed to decide not on the technique, but to take responsibility if something happened.

Boaz: Were there at any stage, problems within this procedure that seemed to stop everything, meaning you couldn't proceed?

Tzvi: Not that I remember.

Boaz: Was it obvious for you that you'd find a way?

Tzvi: I think it was. I don't remember today after all these years, maybe everything seems nicer. But it has been 30 years since then.

Boaz: You're saying, there were people who were saying: Would we be able to expedite the procedure, would it delay us for two years?

Tzvi: We always looked for ways to expedite the procedure. After all, the great State of Israel isn't the natural potential to get into such complicated matters. We always looked for knowledge and procedures. We actually got that.

Boaz: You're saying, it's a small forum that makes these decisions. And this forum?

Tzvi: I don't think that it was even a forum to make these decisions, but a forum for exchanging information. Meaning, if there was no objection you would go forward. If there were an objection - a discussion would take place.

Boaz: Was it an up-to-date reporting to the Prime Minister, to the Minister of Defense?

Tzvi: Pretty much up-to-date, I would say. And don't forget that the Prime Minister would have gotten a parallel report. I was for that matter the Defense Service. He had like a pipeline. The Atomic Energy Commission was part of the Prime Minister's office. It was sort of our subordinate. I was the active one there actually. But of course the Atomic Energy Commission's Director would have met with the Prime Minister himself, and would have reported.

Boaz: And weren't there any meetings between you, the Director and the Prime Minister? Three-sided meetings?

Tzvi: Yes, there were, but regular reporting, up-to-date.

Boaz: Was there cross-reference from the Prime Minister's side?

Tzvi: There was no problem here. The relationship wasn't so suspicious.

Boaz: But at the beginning of the project there were some tense times. Lots of quarrels?

Tzvi: That must have happened to Avner Cohen, because it didn't happen to me. The very establishment of Dimona. There were some difficult people too.

Boaz: Difficult people. And Peres held it close to his chest?

Tzvi: There were many back then. And harsh quarrels, yes to Rafael [Advanced Defense Systems company] or no to Rafael. The quarrels existed in my time, but they were of a very appropriate background. Every major issue that had to be decided on, the Israel Aerospace Industries said it would do it best, IMI Systems said it would do it best, and Rafael is of course the best. You would collect all of the information together and then had to choose. You couldn't have the three of them do it. It's either the first, the second or the third. And this wasn't for the Prime Minister to decide. It

was for the Defense Service to decide. There were very harsh quarrels about many topics on this subject. Everyone wanted to get work. They were very big works. But the debates were, I believe, appropriate.

Boaz: But at least, you say, the whole thing is organized? There's a budget?

Tzvi: Organized and appropriate.

Boaz: There's a mechanism, a joint committee of all factors?

Tzvi: Yes.

Boaz: Because there wasn't one before?

Tzvi: There wasn't one before. When I came there was a committee. I think it was started by Tzvi, Tzvi started it. But he was too one-sided. For that matter, I was less of a side. I was more concerned with the matter.

Boaz: What was his side?

Tzvi: His side was that the Prime Minister's authority wouldn't get hurt. It wasn't a factor for me. What do I care about the Prime Minister... We set up a committee of the Atomic Energy Commission, Defense Ministry and the Prime Minister's Secretary, headed by me.

Boaz: The Prime Minister's Secretary was?

Tzvi: It was Lior, I believe, it changed.

Boaz: The Military Secretary to the Prime Minister?

Were they regular discussions, every week?

Tzvi: I believe they were every week, maybe every two weeks.

Boaz: Was there some oversight? Didn't it happen only behind closed doors?

Tzvi: Yes. I don't know how it works today. But that's how it worked then. Today I don't know.

Boaz: Basically, were those important years on this project?

Tzvi: There was also a council, a broader entity that took care of broader common issues. The missiles, this [nuclear weapons], it also had public figures as members. I was the head of that committee. Much broader issues would come up. But in the end you would conclude it and that's it.

Boaz: So basically it settled down, after the American pressure went down a little bit, were you able to work calmer?

Tzvi: I don't think it was only the American pressure. When I was in office and the work was organized, there were American visitors who came to Dimona to check us out. There was huge pressure here. The smallest mistake and the whole thing would be over.

Boaz: How do you pass the review?

Tzvi: There was a very serious problem here.

Boaz: You would've prepared it for months?

Tzvi: Months and lots of money. Until the Americans themselves realized that the fact they weren't discovering anything didn't mean there wasn't anything, so there's no need to be humiliated. They decided to cancel the visitation themselves. It was a very difficult yearly visit.

Boaz: When you say money, does it mean you'd make all sorts of camouflages?

Tzvi: Yes. You can imagine there are several things in the reactor that you would identify immediately. You need to make the corridor go on and not get there. You need to make the corridor differently. So there were some serious problems here, I would say. During the period you're saying was organized, and I think it was organized, there was this American tactical pressure.

Boaz: You didn't agree to an American surprise visit by any means?

Tzvi: No, it was agreed.

Boaz: That it wouldn't happen?

Tzvi: It was agreed beforehand. In Golda's or Eshkol's policy. It was an issue for the political grade, to prevent a surprise visit. But when they came, it was an open visit, they could go anywhere.

Boaz: They could ask to see anything?

Tzvi: Yes.

Boaz: Because you claimed you weren't hiding anything?

Tzvi: No. It cost money here.

Boaz: On this issue with the Americans, on this subject and also what you said earlier about the acquisition. Were you really in contact with Yitzhak Rabin on the issue of the embassy there? He saw it as his main task, to try and organize this lobby?

Tzvi: When I entered office Rabin was still the Chief of General Staff. Then he went to become the ambassador.

Boaz: In 1968.

Tzvi: He was a very cooperative ambassador, very helpful. And without any issues of respect. When I would come to visit I would go and see the Minister of Defense, the Deputy Minister of Defense. The American Deputy Minister of Defense was the one who dealt with the acquisition. You'd have to come with the list, and he would tell you: This yes, this no, this yes, this no. You would send the list to Yitzhak first, and he would say: I'll go there with you. You'd go to the meeting with Yitzhak, who knew all about these subjects.

Boaz: Is that an advantage?

Tzvi: Yes. But he would let you run the show. He would sit tight like a decent ambassador. Wouldn't cause any problems. I always added that to his credit. A. He was there. B. He was totally informed and could manage the same discussion. And usually I ran it by him. Twice a year when you decided you needed to get equipped, stay in touch, talk and come with the updated lists - Yitzhak would give you the whole floor, and it never... it interfered, of course... it wasn't conceivable, but he wouldn't even try to hurt you.