

May 16, 1961

**Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for
Atomic Energy and Outer Space Philip J. Farley,
Memorandum of Conversation, 'Israeli Atomic
Energy Program'**

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Summary:

Farley reports on a conversation with Mordechai Gazit regarding the American visit to Dimona and the purposes of the visit.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

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Series A
Israel Reactor
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DATE: May 16, 1961

SUBJECT: Israeli Atomic Energy Program

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Mordechai Gazit, Minister Plenipotentiary,
Embassy of Israel
Philip J. Farley, S/AE

COPIES TO: NEA - Mr. Meyer
Amembassy TEL AVIV - Mr. Barnes

In the course of working out arrangements for the visit to Israel by two AEC scientists, Mr. Gazit invited me to lunch with him which I did today.

He pressed me repeatedly on what the United States expected to achieve by the visit. Certainly we did not plan to issue an announcement that we had visited Dimona and found it pure? If not, what did we know other than that as yet there was nothing other than peaceful activities under way? I said that I did not believe we would want to make an announcement. However, we have been somewhat guarded in our statements both in public and in private regarding the exclusively peaceful nature of the Dimona project and have carefully stated that our attitude was necessarily based on assurances. We would after the visit presumably be able to speak with more confidence and (unobtrusively) without any protective qualifications. Furthermore, I thought we would certainly continue to urge the Israeli Government to treat the Dimona project on an open basis and have scientists from other countries visit the reactor and have this known.

Gazit also asked repeatedly why the United States had been so concerned and had made such an issue of the project. Surely we

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could understand that the secrecy was in the main a protection for suppliers against the Arab boycott. Even if the reactor would produce some plutonium, it would be many years before it went critical, the plutonium was separated and the first bombs could be made. I said that the thing which most concerned us, other than the fact that the project had come as a surprise to us, was the impact in the area of an apparent Israeli commitment to work toward nuclear weapons. If the Arabs believed that this was Israel's goal, the impact on their planning would be great immediately even if Israel's achievement of the goal was some years off. While the assurances given by Ben-Gurion and to some extent backed up by the United States had done a good deal to take the pressure off the Arabs to achieve a balancing atomic capability, there would be a lingering doubt because of the secrecy of the project; indeed we saw constant evidences of increased determination by the UAR to construct a larger reactor than they had previously done more than talk about.

Gazit also directed the conversation repeatedly to the grim security situation in which Israel found itself surrounded by fanatically hostile Arab neighbors. In this situation Israel naturally looked to whatever means it could find for protecting itself. I said that in the United States many of us understand the situation of Israel and many of us could understand how if we were in Israel's situation we would decide that we should develop nuclear weapons in order to capitalize on our technological superiority. However, understanding that and looking at the situation of Israel from our own position outside, we felt impelled to say that this would be a terrible mistake for Israel as well as for world stability. I could not see how Israel could long expect to have nuclear weapons without its enemies also getting them in some way. Once there were nuclear weapons on both sides, I thought Israel would be in a desperate state. Its territory was simply too small for it to survive even a small nuclear exchange. I thought from my limited knowledge of the situation that fanatic Arabs might well if it were in their power initiate such an exchange, which would lead to destruction of perhaps 25% of the Arab world but virtually all of Israel.

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Gazit said that, even if the atomic bomb is not the answer, Israel needs to maintain its deterrent. Right now the UAR is getting MIG's which are superior to any plane the Israelis will have for a year or so when improved French fighters will become available. If the Israeli deterrent is to be effective, they need something like the HAWK missile. He could not understand why the United States would refuse such a defensive weapon to Israel. I said that I was not familiar with this particular question but that I personally would be reluctant to see the United States take the initiative in providing missiles even of limited capability and thus starting off a new chain of competition in the acquisition of missiles of various ranges and types.

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