

Foreign Relations, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962

Memorandum of Conversation (1)

Washington, January 9, 1961.

PARTICIPANTS

Assistant Secretary Lewis Jones

Special Assistant Philip J. Farley

Senators Gore, Hickenlooper, Fulbright, Carlson, Sparkman (last three present most of the time but not entire time)

At the request of Senator Gore (Chairman, Near East Sub-Committee, Senate Foreign Relations Committee) Jones and Farley presented themselves in Mr. Marcy's office in the room off the main Senate Foreign Relations Room. Senator Gore was in the chair. Messrs. Marcy and Newhouse of Committee staff were present but no transcript was taken.

Senator Gore told those present that he had given his word to the Department that there would be no publicity regarding this very informal meeting. He said the issue was a sensitive one. The other Senators agreed.

Jones followed in his presentation the greater part of the document which he had brought with him but did not get an opportunity, owing to the interruptions, to describe the "side effects" of the **Dimona** reactor.

It was evident that all those present, but particularly Senators Hickenlooper and Gore, were annoyed that Israel had not only concealed its activity but had "deliberately misled" the United States Government. Senator Gore questioned closely Jones' statement that Israeli officials had told U.S. officials, when asked about the buildings lying 25 miles southwest of Beersheba, that it was first a "textile plant" and then a "metallurgical works". He asked whether there was a record of these statements by the Israelis. Jones said that he doubted whether there was more of a record than recent telegrams from our Embassy in Tel Aviv. Statements could have been made by Israeli officials who were not really "in the know". Senator Hickenlooper said that he had definite knowledge that the GOI had "lied" to an American official (whom he did not identify) in the late summer or early fall. This official "did not belong to the State Department". Asked whether it was Dr. Gomberg, Senator Hickenlooper said it was not.

Senator Fulbright said it was the secrecy factor which troubled him: if the Israelis had nothing to hide, as GOI statements indicated; why did they hide it? Jones explained that there was validity in the Israeli fear of intensified Arab boycott of its suppliers if reactor was constructed openly. The fault on the Israeli side lay in keeping the reactor secret too long: long after the buildings were plainly visible from a public road.

Senator Hickenlooper was concerned by the cost figures of the overall project. He did not believe the \$5,000,000 per year foreign exchange costs for four years mentioned by GOI.

Senator Gore was concerned by the effect of the existence of the **Dimona** reactor upon the Arabs and wanted to know what firm evidence the Department had that knowledge of **Dimona** had driven them into the hands of the Russians. He was interested in the January 28 meeting of the Arab League and wondered whether any drastic decisions would emerge therefrom. Jones replied that he felt at this stage the Arabs would confine themselves to talk--after all plutonium from **Dimona** was three or four years away. He said there had been an indication that Nasser had asked the USSR for help to build a 30-40 megawatt reactor in Egypt--comparable to **Dimona**.

The Senators appeared to accept the Department's thesis that another round of publicity would be unhelpful. Senator Gore asked Jones to advise him if "anything new" emerged from Ambassador Harman's call on the Secretary January 11. (2) Jones promised to do this.

The Senators also appeared to accept the idea that if the United States were to take measures against Israel this might be a signal for intensified Arab action against Israel.

Senators Sparkman and Hickenlooper at different times expressed doubts that the United States could force Israel as a sovereign state to reveal full information if Israel did not choose to supply it. Both commented, however, that the United States had various means of pressure which it could apply to Israel if this needed.

The Senators also appeared to accept Jones' thesis that the problem of plutonium produced in reactors goes far beyond Israel--that it would be unfair to publicly brand Israel as a villain on suspicion that it might--three or four years hence--divert some plutonium to weapons. All reactors everywhere produce some plutonium. This pointed up the need for generally applicable international inspection and control.

The Senators listened with keen interest to Mr. Farley's elucidation of the kind of control which the International Atomic Energy Agency might exercise in the future and the present narrow range of its safeguards activities. Farley also explained in response to Senator Gore's request his views on the latest Soviet attitude towards suspension of atomic testing.

Senator Hickenlooper, towards the end of the meeting, said that he agreed that atomic energy is a coming thing. "Peacefully applied atomic energy is like electricity: whether we like it or not countries are going to get it". The United States cannot and should not attempt to keep countries like Israel from getting into the field. The problem is how to assure that atomic energy is used *only* for peaceful purposes.

In general, the discussion moved from the specific case of the **Dimona** reactor, about which Israel had been so regrettably secretive, to the more general problem of peaceful uses and control over comparable reactors elsewhere in the world.

(1)-Source: Department of State, Central Files, 984A.1901/1-961. Secret. Drafted by Jones (NEA).

(2)- The memorandum of conversation is *ibid.*, 884A.1901/1-1161. See Supplement, the compilation on Israel.

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Letter From the Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations (Macomber) to the Executive Director of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy (Ramey) (1)

Washington, January 19, 1961.

Dear Mr. Ramey: At the conclusion of the closed hearing on December 9, 1960, Representative Durham requested Mr. Farley to inform the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy of subsequent information received concerning the Israeli atomic energy program. Mr. Farley subsequently advised the Committee staff that, at the first meeting between Secretary Herter and the Israeli Ambassador later on December 9, the Ambassador disclaimed any detailed knowledge of the reactor installation near **Dimona**. Our inquiries of the Israeli Government and also of the French Government have been pressed since that time. In accordance with the Committee's request and Mr. Farley's telephone conversation with Mr. Conway on January 13, the enclosed summary of the information obtained is submitted for the information of the Committee. Also attached for your convenience is a compilation of public statements. (2) Responsible officers of the Department of State will be available to discuss this information with the Committee if desired.

The official statements which the Israeli and French Governments have now given us are unequivocal as to the non-military character of the Israeli program and French assistance to it. We do not anticipate that these Governments will provide us with significant additional information in the near future. You will note, however, that we have been given formal assurance that visitors from the United States or another friendly country will be received when the present intense public interest in the question has subsided. We believe that this will be very helpful in providing first-hand reassurance, and we intend to follow up this offer at an early date.

Any possibility of proliferation of nuclear weapons--particularly in the Middle East--obviously is a matter of grave concern to the Department. We shall continue to follow this matter closely. We do not believe, however, that extended public speculation regarding the Israeli atomic energy program will advance the interests of the United States, and we have taken and will continue to take any feasible measures to damp down speculation on this matter and in particular to avoid giving occasion for renewed suspicions and possible undesirable reactions in the Arab world. We believe that persistent but quiet diplomatic approaches are most likely to be productive.

The continued cooperation of the Joint Committee in avoiding public comment is most helpful in this regard.

Sincerely yours,

William B. Macomber, Jr. (3)

(1)- Source: Department of State, Central Files, 884A.1901/1-1961. Secret. Drafted by Farley (S/AE) on January 17 and cleared by Meyer (NEA/NE) and Schnee (H). Copies of the letter and its enclosures were sent to the Atomic Energy Commission and the Central Intelligence Agency

(2)- Attached but not printed.

(3)- Printed from a copy that indicates Macomber signed the original.