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Memorandum of Conversation/1/

Kennedy-Reid meeting: aspects of U.S. relations with Israel

Washington, January 31, 1961.

/1/Source: Department of State

NEA/NE Files: Lot 63 D 33,

Tel Aviv.

Secret.

Drafted by Hamilton (NEA/NE) on February 2.

SUBJECT

Ambassador Reid's Review of His Conversation with President Kennedy/2/

/2/Ambassador Reid met with President Kennedy from 11:14 a.m. to 12:05 p.m. on January 31. (Kennedy Library, President's Appointment Books) Reid completed his mission as Ambassador to Israel on January 19.

PARTICIPANTS

Ambassador Ogden R. Reid
NE--William L. Hamilton
NE--William R. Crawford, Jr.

(Ambassador Reid spent forty-five minutes in the President's office, during which the President excused himself to see another visitor for a few minutes in an adjoining room. It is my impression that the President permitted Ambassador Reid to develop the conversation as he chose, expressing views of his own infrequently, if at all).

Peace with the Arabs: Ben-Gurion has some power to maneuver on his own initiative, and would make reciprocal concessions in order to obtain a "de facto peace". This would have to be achieved on a very secret basis, the participants communicating only through the most carefully guarded channels. Any U.S. contribution would have to be on a basis of direct contact with Ben-Gurion. He informed the President of Ben-Gurion's support for the type of contact known as the "Anderson mission,"/3/ which he explained in some detail when the President indicated he had not previously heard of this effort.

/3/

Reference is to the mission of Robert B. Anderson, Special Emissary for President Eisenhower to the Middle East, January-March 1956. Documentation on his special mission is in *Foreign Relations*, 1955-1957, volume XV.

USSR Relations with the UAR: Ambassador Reid said he told the President that the UAR's dependence on the USSR can be expressed in terms of three "screws" that the latter can twist as it wishes to bring pressure on Egypt. These are (1) cotton

purchases, (2) arms supply, and (3) the Aswan Dam and other economic aid. The West could reduce Soviet influence if it could substitute Western effort for some or all of these activities.

Israel's New Atomic Reactor: The Ambassador told the President he believes we can accept at face value Ben-Gurion's assurances that the reactor is to be devoted to peaceful purposes. An inspection of the reactor by a qualified United States scientist **can be arranged when the United States wishes, if it is done on a secret basis.** Overt examination and announcement of the result to the world will require greater effort, but could be done. [2 lines of source text not declassified] Reid suspects that very few people in Israel knew of the development's true character, possibly not even the Foreign Minister, Golda Meir, until it hit the headlines.

Arms Balance in the Israel-Arab Complex: Ambassador Reid apparently made a detailed presentation of the Israel case for more sophisticated weaponry to protect itself against surprise air attack by the UAR. The Ambassador accepts the Israel estimate that its population centers are only four minutes from Damascus by supersonic aircraft. Ambassador Reid urged United States consideration of ballistic missiles for Israel and more specific assurances of our willingness to help in case of invasion, as moves that will contribute to stability in the Middle East. He told the President of our offer, now outstanding, of early-warning equipment, which Israel is studying. He suggested that we try to shorten delivery times for these items.

Aid to Africa: Ambassador Reid reviewed at some length Israel's technical assistance efforts with the new states of Africa, apparently giving them a high rating for effectiveness, and suggesting that the United States would be well advised to keep Israel in mind as offering an adjunct to Western efforts in Africa. He told the President that Ben-Gurion is now disappointed he did not mention Israel's African program when they met last year.

State of the Union and Inaugural Messages:^{/4/} Ambassador Reid told the President he had been struck by the phrase on accepting "the risk of leadership" and the President's reference to time not necessarily being on our side. He said the President had told him his omission of the Middle East in his messages had not been deliberate or an evidence of his indifference to the problems of the area. On the contrary, the President, according to Ambassador Reid, said he is very much interested in ways in which peace might be achieved.

^{/4/}For texts of President Kennedy's inaugural address of January 20 and his first State of the Union address on January 30, see *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961*, pp. 1-3 and 19-28.

The Lavon Affair:^{/5/} According to Ambassador Reid, the President expressed interest in the Lavon affair, and asked the Ambassador who he thinks would succeed to power if Ben-Gurion were to leave the scene. Ambassador Reid had replied Eshkol is the name most frequently mentioned, and had expressed the personal opinion that Moshe Dayan, former Chief of Staff, now Minister of Agriculture and long a Ben-Gurion protege, would refuse to serve in a successor cabinet which did not include Ben-Gurion. Abba Eban, former Ambassador to the United States and now Minister of Education, would have more difficulty making up his mind, but, as a tribute to Ben-Gurion might also choose to refuse a cabinet appointment. Ambassador Reid indicated he had told the President that Eban has made reasonably successful efforts to acquire a common touch, but still does not have the political sex appeal of Moshe Dayan.

^{/5/}Pinhas Lavon, Minister of Defense, was forced to resign in February 1955 after a sabotage operation aimed at exacerbating U.S.-Egyptian relations was exposed by Egyptian authorities. In 1960, new evidence indicated that Lavon's alleged authorization of the operation was a forgery and he asked for an investigation. A committee of seven Cabinet members cleared him of responsibility amid charges between Lavon and Ben Gurion and Ben Gurion's supporters in the Ministry of Defense. Ben Gurion refused to accept the committee decision and resigned, thus forcing new elections. Additional information concerning the Israeli Cabinet crisis is in a February 7 memorandum entitled "Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's Resignation," presumably prepared in the National Security Council Staff. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Country Series, Israel, 2/61)