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**5. Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy/1/**

Washington, January 30, 1961.

/1/Source: Department of State, Central Files, 884A.1901/1-3061. **Secret.** Drafted by Meyer (NEA/NE).

SUBJECT  
**Israel's Atomic Energy Activities**

In 1955 under the "Atoms-for-Peace" program the United States undertook to assist Israel with its atomic energy development program. Subsequently a one megawatt research reactor was built with our aid at Nahal Rubin, near Tel Aviv.

In the summer and early fall of 1960 rumors reached our Embassy at Tel Aviv that the French were collaborating with the Israelis in the construction of a large reactor at Dimona, near Beersheba, in the northern part of the Negev desert. After our intelligence agencies had established on December 2 that a significant atomic installation **was in fact being built near Beersheba**, Secretary Herter **on December 9 called in Israeli Ambassador Harman who undertook to obtain full information from his government.** After a number of exchanges, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion gave us categorical assurances supported by appropriate public statements to the effect that Israel does not have plans for developing nuclear weaponry. The French have also assured us that their assistance is premised on Israel's atomic energy program being solely for peaceful purposes.

***Ben-Gurion had indicated that aside from normal military precautions the reason for Israel's extreme secrecy with respect to the Dimona project was his fear and that of the foreign firms assisting the project that the Arab states would boycott or take other retaliatory measures against any firm or even country assisting the project. There is considerable justification for this Israeli reasoning.***

Our government's concern was two-fold :

- a) pursuant to Congressional legislation and firm executive branch policy the United States is opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons capabilities; and
- b) **Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons would have grave repercussions** in the Middle East, not the least of which might be the probable stationing of Soviet nuclear weapons on the soil of Israel's embittered Arab neighbors.

The Israeli and French assurances which we have received appear to be satisfactory, although several minor questions still require clarification.

***In any case, the Department considers this not a single episode but a continuing subject and it is the intention of our intelligence agencies to maintain a continuing watch on Israel as on other countries to assure that nuclear weapons capabilities are not being proliferated.***

At the moment, we are encouraging the Israelis to permit a qualified scientist from the United States or other friendly power to visit the Dimona installation. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion has indicated that this may be possible at an early date.

A full chronology of our interest in Israel's atomic energy activities is attached in the event that it may be of interest to you./2/

/2/Attached but not printed.

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/3/Printed from a copy that indicates Rusk