

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

1961-1962

Released by the Office of the Historian  
Documents 45-65 (53)

**Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Battle) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) (1)**

Washington, May 26, 1961.

SUBJECT

U.S. Scientists' Visit to Israel's **Dimona** Reactor

Messrs. U.M. Staebler and J.W. Croach, the United States scientists permitted to visit Israel's **Dimona** reactor responsive to our suggestions that such a visit would be helpful in allaying international concern, have returned from their visit. On Thursday, May 25, they discussed their findings with officers of the Department of State.

Their written report will be available very soon. (2) In the meantime, it is of general interest that they were received with cordiality and permitted to visit the several installations which are engaged in nuclear research, including the reactor at **Dimona**. They report themselves as satisfied that nothing was concealed from them and that the reactor is of the scope and peaceful character previously described to United States officials by representative of the Government of Israel.

The two scientists were informed that Israel's decision to expand nuclear development beyond the laboratory research stage was taken in 1957 with the appointment of a committee, which first considered and then rejected because of its expense the establishment of two large reactors for production of industrial power. Instead, it selected the program which it is now pursuing, i.e., the construction of a research reactor which can provide experience for scientific and technical personnel in essentially all of the problems posed by a power reactor.

**The present center was conceived as a means for gaining experience in construction of a nuclear facility which would eventually prepare them for the production of nuclear power.** They have chosen natural uranium as fuel because of a desire to be able to produce as much as possible of it from their own vast potash resources. Ground was broken for the plant in 1959.

It might be desirable to bring the following tentative conclusions and opinions of the scientists to the President's attention, prior to his May 30 meeting with Prime Minister Ben-Gurion:

1. From the standpoint of keeping abreast of the reactor's development and ascertaining that its purpose continues to be non-military, a second visit would not be necessary before another year.
2. Israel's obsession with secrecy is regrettable, but perhaps understandable in view of Israel's physical and political circumstances. Israel's reasons for secrecy include: (a) a possible boycott by the Arabs of manufacturers on whom Israel depends, (b) proximity of the reactor to international borders with vulnerability to sabotage, and (c) conviction that Arab awareness of Israel's scientific capability would not be in Israel's national interest.

3. While, like others of its size and character, the reactor eventually will produce small quantities of plutonium suitable for weapons, there is no present evidence that the Israelis have weapon production in mind.
4. The Israelis report the reactor will not be completed before 1964, although this may be too conservative an estimate.
5. There is strong evidence of close French scientific collaboration and support.
6. The reactor and its complex of laboratories, storehouses, fuel dumps, water towers, general services, transient quarters for scientists, etc., occupies a square 750 meters to a side. The surrounding fenced security area, however, is much larger.
7. On United States scales, the reactor, when completed, might represent a \$15 million investment, with the supporting plant another \$20 million.
8. Even with the Great Power assistance they may have had from France, Israel's **Dimona** project is a most creditable accomplishment both in concept and execution.

Melvin L. Manfull (3)

/1/Source: Department of State, Central Files, 884A.1901/5-2661. Secret. Drafted by Hamilton and cleared by Furnas.

/2/Not found.

/3/Printed from a copy that indicates Manfull signed the original above Battle's typed signature.