

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

1961-1962

**28. Memorandum From Acting Secretary of State Bowles to President Kennedy/1/**

Washington, March 30, 1961.

/1/Source: Department of State, Central Files, 611.84A45/3-3061. Secret. Drafted by Lewis Jones.

**SUBJECT**

Dimona Reactor in Israel

U.S. desire to visit Dimona reactor in Israel.

On March 27 you inquired regarding the status of the promised invitation for American experts to visit quietly the Israeli nuclear reactor at Dimona. Deputy Under Secretary Roger Jones promised to provide you with a reply. This invitation was first promised to us by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion on January 4 through Ambassador Reid./2/

/2/See Document 1.

The enclosed chronology regarding the Dimona reactor shows that the Department has been reminding the Israel Government at approximately weekly intervals through Ambassador Harman of the importance of an early "quiet" visit by Americans to Dimona./3/

/3/Attached but not printed.

Following your telephone call, Assistant Secretary Lewis Jones called in Ambassador Harman and again told him that we are anxiously waiting the Israeli invitation (see memorandum of conversation enclosed)./4/ On this occasion Harman, who personally shares our belief that the visit should take place soon, reiterated the difficulties occasioned by the internal political crisis in Israel. He said, and our Embassy at Tel Aviv confirms, that the Israeli leaders are profoundly preoccupied by their internal political problems. This is particularly true of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, who is personally in charge of Israel's atomic energy program.

/4/Attached but not printed. Also in Department of State, Central Files, 884A.1901/3-2861.

When Jones urged Harman to make a new effort to hasten the invitation, Harman said he would do so but that in any case it was unlikely that any decision could be taken in Israel during the next few days. Between April 3 and April 10 is Passover Week, when little work is done in Israel.

The Department believes that Harman is probably right regarding the unlikelihood of the Israelis issuing an invitation prior to April 10, although our latest démarche to Harman using your name is likely to be helpful to this end.

We believe that Ben-Gurion fully intends to issue the invitation. Part of his difficulty is (a) that, having given his word, he does not like to be pushed by the United States, and (b) he is personally in the greatest internal political difficulty of his career. He probably feels that his problems may be compounded if his enemies have something new to pin on him arising out of his handling of the Dimona reactor affair. It is for the latter reason that when the visit takes place it should be a quiet one regarding which there should be no United States publicity.

Chester Bowles/5/

/5/Printed from a copy that indicates Bowles signed the original.