

NEA:PhillipsTalbot:hmh

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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6/29/61.

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By ~~4-8~~, NARA, Date 1-14-93

DATE: May 30, 1961

984a.8293

SUBJECT: Conversation between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Ben Gurion

PLACE: President's Suite, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York City

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
Prime Minister Ben Gurion of Israel  
Ambassador Avraham Harman of Israel  
Phillips Talbot, Assistant Secretary of State for NEA  
Myer Feldman, Deputy Special Assistant to the President

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After an exchange of amenities, in which each expressed his pleasure at meeting the other, the President and Prime Minister Ben Gurion plunged into a discussion of Israel's Dimona reactor. The President said he was glad that two American scientists had had an opportunity to visit the reactor and had given him a good report of it. Since some nations are disturbed at the prospect of the construction in Israel of a large reactor, with plutonium producing capability, the President suggested that - "on the theory that a woman should not only be virtuous but also have the appearance of virtue" - our problem is how to disseminate information about the nature of the reactor in such a way as to remove any doubts other nations might have as to Israel's peaceful purposes.

The Prime Minister said he wanted to talk about the reactor in the context of Israel's problems.

The greatest of these problems, and an almost insoluble one, he described as Israel's serious shortage of fresh water. Even when the Jordan River is effectively tapped there will not be enough fresh water for the southern part of Israel, he added. The only solution to this continuing shortage that Israel could discern is desalinization of sea water, a process that is technically possible but would be economically practicable only if very cheap power were available. Israel hopes that atomic power, which is now expensive, will become much cheaper and will make possible the economic desalinization of sea water. It had therefore consulted with Dr. Bhabha of India and with

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scientists from England and had followed the suggestion that Israel should gain the necessary scientific knowledge to take full advantage of the coming age of nuclear power. In building the Dimona reactor for this purpose the Prime Minister acknowledged that Israel had received assistance from France.

Israel's main - and for the time being, only - purpose in this, the Prime Minister said, adding that "we do not know what will happen in the future; in three or four years we might have need for a plant to process plutonium".

Commenting on the political and strategic implications of atomic power and weaponry, the Prime Minister said he does not believe that Russia wants to give atomic capacity to Egypt now but he does believe that "in ten or fifteen years the Egyptians presumably could achieve it themselves".

The President observed that while the Prime Minister's estimate might be correct, we do not want by our own actions to increase tensions in the Middle East. He explained that the United States is much involved with Israel in the Middle East and it is to our common interest that no country believe that Israel is contributing to the proliferation of atomic weapons. That is obvious, he added, that the UAR would not permit Israel to go ahead in this field without getting into it itself.

The President then asked again whether, as a matter of reassurance, the Arab states might be advised of findings of the American scientists who had viewed the Dimona reactor. In reply, the Prime Minister said, "You are absolutely free to do what you wish with the report. If you feel you should publish it, we have no objection."

The President expressed his appreciation of the Prime Minister's willingness to agree to this action. He added that of course the United States is sometimes suspect in matters dealing with Israel, "because we are close friends", and asked whether it would not be helpful to let neutral scientists also observe the reactor. Ben Gurion asked who are really neutrals these days? The President commented that although Khrushchev says that no man is neutral, there are, after all, such neutrals as the Scandinavians and the Swiss. The Prime Minister said he would have no objection to this. The President expressed his satisfaction at the Prime Minister's reply. He was pleased he could feel that Israel would agree to going ahead with this.

Prime Minister Ben Gurion then raised the question of Israel's security. The deficit is increasing in Israel's arms as compared to the UAR military

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Presumably plutonium produced in the Dimona reactor could be processed in France, in the United States or in Israel. This multiplicity of processing opportunities would increase the difficulty of effective supervision.

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equipment, he said; the UAR has more planes and tanks and now they have 200 Russian instructors. This means that while the gap in quantity is growing the gap in quality is being narrowed. Nasser's declared aim, the Prime Minister added, is to destroy not just to defeat Israel. "If they should defeat us they would do to the Jews what Hitler did". He asserted also that the Arabs do not value human life and that this makes the problem more difficult.

Prime Minister Ben Gurion referred to his visit last year with President Eisenhower. On that visit he had asked the United States for weapons - especially for defensive weapons, because the UAR has 26 air fields and Israel has only four. Before leaving Washington he had asked whether he could leave the United States with the assumption that he would get the weapons, and had been told "that is a fair assumption". (Presumably the Prime Minister was referring to Hawks). He said he still does not see why Israel cannot get these weapons. He felt it is in the best interest of the United States for Israel to have defensive weapons.

The President commented that he had not found records which permit a firm conclusion about what had been committed by the previous Administration, but that the problem, as we see it, is that while the Hawk is a defensive weapon it is also a missile and should missiles come into the Middle Eastern area, military weaponry will escalate fast. This is a problem, he said, to which we will continue to address ourselves, because we do not want to see Israel at a disadvantage. But we are reluctant to introduce missiles into the Middle East; the other side might then introduce ground-to-ground missiles. He repeated that if Israel were faced with a critical break-through of weapons on the other side, we would have our views of what to do. But we will need a better understanding of the danger and we hesitate to be the ones to introduce missiles into the region.

The Prime Minister explained that he was not asking for these weapons on the basis of a commitment made by the previous Administration but on the merits of the case. Acknowledging this, the President observed again that what we are concerned about is introducing missiles into the region.

There followed a brief discussion of tanks and planes available to the UAR and to Israel, with figures taken from the briefing book that the President had at hand. The Prime Minister said that the UAR has 300 fighters, with 200 more they could call upon from other Arab nations. Israel has ordered 60 Mirages from the French. The first of these may be delivered by the end of this year but it will take more than 12 months for them to be delivered in full. Commenting on the performance capability of the MIG 19, the President observed that we cannot eliminate the hazard but we would not want Israel to get into such a position of inferiority that an attack on it would be encouraged. The Prime Minister again suggested that the Hawk, a defensive weapon, would be the best way to avoid this danger at the present time and that it could not threaten any other country.

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Summing up this aspect of the conversation, the President said that the Hawk had been given to only a few other countries and that if it were introduced into Israel the next development on the other side might be an air-to-ground or ground-to-ground missile. He said we will watch this matter with care and added, "You don't feel that this is a satisfactory answer to your request, but you can be assured that we will continue to watch the situation."

Turning to another subject, Prime Minister Ben Gurion commented that now the President was going to see Premier Khrushchev. In 1956 Khrushchev and Bulganin and Prime Minister Eden had issued a declaration for the integrity and independence of all the states in the Middle East, and last year the French, on a visit in Moscow, had issued a similar declaration on May 19. If a joint declaration like those of 1956 and 1960 could be issued by the President and Premier Khrushchev the Prime Minister felt it would be helpful.

The President asked what in the Prime Minister's judgment would be the response of Arab countries to such a declaration. To this the Prime Minister answered that several small countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq would accept the declaration gladly because they would feel it would protect them against Nasser. The President then asked whether Russia would be likely to do anything now to displease Nasser. Prime Minister Ben Gurion called this unlikely but added that if Khrushchev would be willing to do this it would help stabilize the situation in the Middle East. The President suggested that Nasser probably would object to this declaration, because he thinks that the present borders between Israel and the UAR are not fixed and he asked whether in this circumstance Khrushchev would be likely to accept such a declaration. The Prime Minister doubted that Khrushchev would do this but commented that it would be a test to see whether Khrushchev is really interested in relaxing world tensions. The President observed in this connection that he thinks Khrushchev is pushing hard on many issues.

The President expressed interest in the Prime Minister's views of Nasser's relations with Russia. These are very close, Ben Gurion answered. "Nasser is not a Communist, but he relies on Russia and gets Russian support to get into Africa. The African leaders are not Communists either - even Sekou Toure - but they are pro-Communist. Nasser is working very hard in these countries. His efforts help bring the Russians into them also."

On a broader front, the Prime Minister said he does not believe there will be a hot war. The American people don't want war, nor do the Russian people. Agreeing, the President observed that nevertheless the danger is there. The Soviet Union wants to push us out of Berlin. We cannot permit the USSR to destroy the Atlantic Alliance and we cannot permit ourselves to be forced out of Berlin, he said. If we should be forced out of Berlin Europe would no longer associate itself with us in NATO. And then, the Prime Minister added, you would be forced out of Europe. Yes, the President said, and then back to our own shores. But we don't intend that to happen.

Prime Minister Ben Gurion pointed out the United States accepted the status quo but the Russians do not. "The Russians think you are doomed,

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and they say so." The President responded that one can argue that systems in many countries may be doomed but not the people, adding, "I can say that doom would be hastened if we were to be run out of Berlin. What interest would you have in a guarantee from us if we let ourselves be pushed out of Berlin?" The Prime Minister responded again that a guarantee of Middle East borders would provide a test case of Soviet intentions. To this the President replied that he was not sure our security problems are not as great as Israel's. The Prime Minister saw in the two situations the difference that "we are the only remnants of a people that have been fighting for survival for the past 4000 years. If Nasser defeats us, we are destroyed."

The President asked the Prime Minister for his estimate of current tensions in the area of Israel. The Prime Minister responded that the borders are more or less quiet; there has been a little worry about Aqaba but the Secretary General has reassured him that everything was quiet there. Nevertheless the dangers remain in such places as Jordan and Iraq where regimes depend upon the life of a single man. They are much more worried than we are, the Prime Minister said, because Nasser can send someone to assassinate one man whereas in a democracy everybody would fight. Even Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey are afraid of what might happen. Such a declaration as he had suggested would, in the Prime Minister's view, give more confidence to all the smaller Arab and other Middle East peoples.

The President asked the Prime Minister's views of the Palestine Conciliation Commission, explaining that as the Prime Minister knew, the PCC (of which the United States is a member) is obliged to make a report in the fall of 1961. The President expressed the hope that there may be an opportunity there and asked how the Prime Minister felt about it. The latter recalled that in 1953 President Eisenhower had sent a messenger named Anderson to make two exploratory trips in the Middle East. At first Nasser was agreeable to the suggestions that were evolved but the minute he discovered that Israel was serious about them he changed his mind. "All questions in the Middle East depend upon Nasser."

The President said he thought we have to assume that Nasser will make our lives as difficult as possible, and the Prime Minister agreed, unless some pressure is generated among his people for peace.

The Prime Minister said that all the people in the uncommitted world are watching the U. S. and other Western countries. For these people, freedom does not mean what it does to us. What makes an impression is better standards of living and health and education. It is not just money they want; they want to feel that they are treated as human beings. This is why Israel is working with Africans. "If you will succeed with the Peace Corps idea - with Americans going out not as superior human beings but to help others - this psychological factor will be more important than the large amounts of money you give away."

The Prime Minister then described how Israel has brought Asians and Africans into its population and has made its Army an educational

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institution, which is of great interest to other countries such as G that are trying to develop themselves. He spoke of the Afro-Asian I in the University where Asians and Africans are taught cooperation and other programs that attract many people to learn in Israel. Hundreds of Indians are also coming to Israel, he said, although Nehru will have relations with Israel. He regretted Nehru's attitude on this point and said that his excuse is that he wants to make peace in the area. "It is not for me to judge him. He is a great man. I admire him. There is no democracy in India; it is the only country in Asia which is democratic except Japan. If Nehru goes I am not sure what will happen; but now it has no democracy."

Continuing his comments on the general world situation, the Prime Minister observed that the only imperialistic country that exists now is Russia, which keeps under its domination many Muslim countries in Asia and former parts of China and many countries in Europe. Yet in the war of propaganda they win because they go against the status quo in other countries. Unless the West can provide what other countries need, we will lose.

Returning to the subject of the Palestine Conciliation Commission, the President stated that its new efforts need a sympathetic hearing. If they fail we may get a "Troika" commission. The United Nations is trying to get a neutral representative who will in turn make the proposal which will involve the three alternatives of repatriation or compensation with resettlement in the Arab countries or elsewhere.

In response, the Prime Minister commented that any commission would be likely to fail in this effort. "They - the UAR and any Arabs - do not care what happens to people. They regard the refugees as the best we have at hand. If they could get hundreds of thousands of Arabs into Israel we would have those and still be surrounded by many millions of other Arabs." He then recapitulated the events immediately following Israel's independence when after several quiet days the Arabs left Israel in large number and in succeeding months Israel had to accept many hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from other countries. He also stated that Israel has absorbed as many Jewish refugees from Arab countries as they have absorbed Arab refugees from Israel.

The President observed that maybe the Arabs would not agree to a realistic plan that the PCC might put forward but if so we would rather have the responsibility of disagreement on them. We are likely to have troubles with our Congress if the US continues paying 70% of the UNRWA costs for caring for refugees. If it appears that Israel is constructing it will make the problem easier.

"Yes, it is always worth trying", the Prime Minister responded. "But until there is peace between Israel and the Arabs I don't see much chance of success."

The President said that although we had been attacked by the pro-

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in the UAR on Cuba and other matters, we want to do our best to see if this PCC effort can succeed. The Prime Minister recalled the recent Bandung Congress at which representatives of many states, including Communist China, attacked the U. S. He said that Israel had sent the U.S. information about this Congress about the way the people think and speak.

In summary, the President said that the conversation had covered several topics: on missiles "I expressed a desire to continually review the missile situation. We are reluctant to give Israel missiles and you understand that, but we would be disturbed if Israel should get into a situation that would invite attack. We will keep the matter under continuing review in our Administration, I can assure you."

On the question of the security guaranty, "I'll see what the atmosphere is. We guess that Khrushchev will not wish to lessen the tension. We will have to feel our way through this. The problem probably will be that we won't get agreement on various issues. If we should, we might try to get an agreement limiting arms to all Africa also."

Before ending the conversation, the Prime Minister said he wished also to take note of the fact that Israel has good relations with Persia and Turkey. Turkey is the more stable and can take care of itself. In Persia there is a very difficult situation; while the people are monarchists, there is corruption and much difficulty. It would help if the U. S. could give them a little more help and encouragement. In response the President said that we and the previous administration have devoted more attention and effort to Iran than to almost any other country in that region. Iran has a large Army. During the recent riots some of our people had questioned whether the Army would support the Shah. There has been a good deal of corruption and there are even stories about the royal family. However, the President thought that this government represented the last best hope and we will do everything to support it. We are for this Government and the new Prime Minister 100%. The Prime Minister said he was delighted to hear this.

In conclusion the President recalled his previous conversations with the Prime Minister. He wanted the Prime Minister to know that we wish relations between our two countries to be close and harmonious and that we want to be helpful in the Middle East. It was for this reason that he had recently written to Nasser. Responding, the Prime Minister assured the President that he does not hate Arabs, that he regards them as human beings and that "we want you to help them." The President expressed his feeling that we want to maintain some influence with them.

As the Prime Minister rose to leave he handed to the President, as a gift, a book written in Latin, published in 1680. This book, he said, was a record of a visit to the Holy Land by the author, Radziwilli, who was a forebear of Prince Radziwill, the husband of President Kennedy's sister-in-law. Accepting the book with gratitude, the President said

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he was going to the christening of the Radziwilla' child in London next week and, with the Prime Minister's permission, would present this book to the child.

The President and the Prime Minister parted with mutual expressions of respect.

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EMBASSY OF ISRAEL  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

סודי ביותר  
לנמען בלבד

שגרירות ישראל  
ושינגטון

ושינגטון, כ"ג בסיון תשכ"א  
7 ביוני 1961

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א ל: מר ג. אבנר, מנהל מאח"

מאח: חציר, ושינגטון

חברון: שיחת רוח"ם עם נשיא ארז"ב

השיחה נרשמה על ידי השגריר ורמן ואלמלא נמצא  
עוז בבית החולים לרגל ענין פקט, אפשר וחיה מוסיף  
כמה הערות לראי.

מכל מקום נראג להשלים את הדיווח בהודעתנו  
הראשונה - אך בינתיים רציתי לצנע דחוי בהעברת  
הפרוטוקול של השיחה.

בשעתו הועבר העתק לרוח"ם אך למען חסדר הנני  
שולח לו העתק נוסף.

ב. ב. כ. ח.  
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מ. גזית

העתק לרוח"ם  
שח"ח

השגריר, אוטבה  
השגריר, לונדון  
השגריר, פאריס

סודי ביותר - לנמען בלבד





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MEETING OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY AND PRIME MINISTER BEN-GURION  
TUESDAY MAY 30th WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL, SUITE 284 - 4:45 - 6:16 P.M.

PRESENT: The President  
The Prime Minister  
Mr. Meyer Feldman; Special Assistant - White House  
Mr. Philip Talbot; Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asia - State Department  
Mr. Abraham Harman; Ambassador of Israel.

Following the taking of photographs the Prime Minister and the President exchanged brief courtesies.

The President told the P.M. that Khrushchev had told the American Ambassador last week that he was going to raise the question of Berlin.

The Prime Minister said that he had a number of matters that he wished to raise and he would begin with the security of Israel. (As far as the Atomic Reactor was concerned was concerned - see attached report).

On the subject of security the Prime Minister stated that there was a big gap in manpower between the UAR and Israel. It was a gap of 2 million to 30 million or 1 to 15. In so far as arms were concerned there was a big gap in both quantity and quality. The UAR was securing arms from the Soviet Union, three times the quantity of what Israel had and also of superior quality. The only advantage that Israel possessed was the superior quality of its manpower, however, it should be noted that the Egyptians were improving the quality of their manpower. They had 200 Russian instructors at their disposal.

It is the officially declared aim of Nasser - whether he means it seriously or not I don't know - but what he tells his people and officers is that his aim is to destroy Israel. The security problem of Israel is unparalleled throughout the world. What is at stake is not the independence of Israel or the control of its territory but the very lives of its people. For if Nasser were to defeat Israel he would do to the people of Israel what Hitler did to the 6 million Jews in Germany.

If Nasser were to attack Israel now he would be defeated, but it would cost Israel a great deal. In our army the officer does not order his men to advance but says to them "follow me". But even if we were to defeat Egypt, Egypt would still remain. If we were to be defeated we would be through. The gap in quantity is growing and the gap in quality of our manpower and that of Egypt is narrowing.

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The Prime Minister continued that last year when he had visited President Eisenhower he had called on the Secretary of State and had been given to understand that it would be a fair assumption for him to take back with him that the Hawk would be supplied. He had told President Eisenhower that he understood that the U.S. would not be a principal supplier of arms to Israel. This he accepted, but there were a few things which were available only in the U.S. and he was thinking particularly of air defense weapons. The air was decisive for our security. The UAR has 26 airfields as against our 3. Israel is a very small narrow country.

The Hawk missile is a defensive weapon and it is only in the U.S. that we could secure this anti-aircraft missile. If we get it we are more or less safe.

Before the UAR got the MIG 19 we were better off because we could rely on the superiority of our pilots. But we have nothing against the MIG 19 or the MIG 21.

President - What about the Mirage?

R.M. - We will get it only in 1962.

President - How many MIG 19s have they got?

R.M. - It is certain that they have 20.

President - We have been over the documents of how this matter was handled in this past administration and it seems to have tapered off. There is no doubt that the Hawk missile is defensive, but it is a missile. The U.S. has tried to remain out of this area as a major supplier of arms. The danger of supplying a missile, even a defensive missile, is that the other side would get missiles, too, and there would be a danger of missile escalation. The situation would be different if you were to be at a disadvantage which would imperil you - but you have these new planes coming and you are getting an electronics system. We are very anxious that you should not be at a disadvantage. I cannot give you an affirmative answer at this time. Of course we don't want to bring missiles into this area. This would lead to the other side bringing in missiles, and perhaps ground to ground missiles.

We need an understanding on the extent of the danger that you face. If there is danger that is one thing, but if there is parity that is another thing. We have not yet given the Hawk even to all NATO countries.

R.M. - I want to make it clear that I am raising this question not on the basis of what I was told last year would be a fair assumption. I have raised this matter because in the last few months the position in the M.E. has become more acute than it was in this respect.

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At this point the President asked his aides to show him the figures that they had on the UAR military strength.

Asst. Sec. Talbot produced a rather fat loose-leaf folder in which there appeared to be a number of position papers. He turned up the relevant page.

The President looked at the figures and said "I see that they have more heavy tanks than you have although you seem to have more light tanks. Of course the artillery depends on the strength." The President read off a list of figures of UAR planes which as far as I could note then included 20 MIG 19, 96 MIG 17, 30 MIG 15, and 50 IL 28. The President then said - How many Mirages do you have on order? Its 60 isn't it?

P.M. - We will get two Mirages this year and the rest next year. The UAR has at least 300 planes.

President - We should continue to watch this count very carefully. Our interests are very closely involved with yours. We want to make sure that you will not be open to attack. An attack against you would be an attack on the U.N. and it would be an attack against the Tripartite Guarantee. We would be involved by that.

P.M. - What I am talking about is a purely defensive weapon.

President - That is so but it is a missile and the next missile would be ground to ground. We have asked the Canadians to accept from us air to ground missiles with a nuclear warhead with a range of only one mile and they have turned it down because it is a nuclear missile even though it is obviously a defensive one.

However, I want to make it clear that our interests are very much in accordance with yours.

P.M. then moved to the next subject, namely, the question of a joint U.S. - Russian declaration in regard to the M.E.

P.M. - When Khrushchev was in London with Bulganin in 1956 he issued with Eden a declaration supporting the integrity and independence of all the countries in the Middle East. In May 1960 a similar declaration was issued with De Gaulle. A declaration on the M.E. which the Russians issued on their own in 1956 contained a specific mention of Israel as one of the Middle Eastern countries. If it were possible to get the Russians to issue a joint declaration with the U.S. on these lines it would not in itself guarantee peace, but it would reduce tension.

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President - The reason why I asked this question is because I wonder whether Khrushchev would do anything which would displease Nasser at the time when he is playing the Arab card. He is playing the Nasser card so strongly that if Nasser objected to such a joint declaration - on the grounds that such a declaration would guarantee the present borders to which the Arabs object - then Khrushchev would not do it.

P.M. - That would depend on whether he really wants a relaxation or not.

President - Judging by his attitude on Berlin, Laos and nuclear testing I don't think he does. What is your judgment of Nasser's relations with Khrushchev?

P.M. - They are very close. Nasser is not a communist and he suppresses the Communist Party as he did the Muslim Brotherhood, but he relies on Khrushchev and Khrushchev relies on him because he brings Russia into Africa.

President - I agree. I think this was clear in the case of the support of Lumumba and Olinga.

P.M. - I have never been to Africa but I have met many African leaders in Israel. I don't think that Sekou Toure is a Communist although he is a pro-Communist. The Malis are not Communists. But Nasser brings the Russians into Africa and the Russians work hard. They have a mutual interest. There won't be hot war because the Russians do not want to risk that.

President - We cannot be moved out of Berlin without breaking the Atlantic Alliance. We do not intend to do that.

P.M. - While the West accepts the status quo even in Hungary in 1956 the Russians do not accept the status quo. Khrushchev, even while he was in the U.S. said that you were doomed.

President - The doom would be hastened if we were to get run out of Berlin. What use would a declaration on our part be to you if we were to get run out of Berlin? I am not so sure that our problems are not as great as yours.

P.M. - The difference is that we are the remnant of a people struggling for its last hold on existence. Israel is our last stop. If we were to be defeated Nasser would leave no Jews in Israel, because as long as there are Jews in Israel there is a danger from his point of view. But Nasser will not risk his regime, for after we have beaten him in the past, another defeat for Nasser, though it would not mean the end of Egypt, would mean the end of Nasser.

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President - How do you measure the tension in the last four or five months?

P.M. - It has been more or less quiet. I was worried about the Straits of Akaba because there was some talk of Egyptians moving in police there, but I met Secretary General Hammarskjöld and he reassured me on this point. This is a vital question for us. Jordan, the Lebanon and Iraq are living in fear of Egypt. Hussein is a very brave young king but if he is killed then Jordan is finished. These Arab countries are more worried about Nasser than we are. I realize that it is a big "if" but if you can get such a joint declaration out of Khrushchev it would spread assurance. Nasser is making all kinds of declarations such as about the Turkish territory of Alexandretta.

President - I would like to ask you about the PCO. The commission has to report to the General Assembly next Fall. This may be one of the opportunities to do something.

P.M. - President Eisenhower sent Anderson to Jerusalem and Cairo. After he first saw Nasser he came to Jerusalem and apparently felt that Nasser was reasonable. However, when he had visited Nasser for the second time he came back and said that Nasser was hopeless. Apparently, the first time Nasser had thought that I was not serious, but when Anderson made it clear to him that I meant business Nasser retracted. Everything depends on Russia.

President - Even on the refugees?

P.M. - Yes, for the M.E. as a whole.

President - Well, I don't think Khrushchev will make life easier for us.

P.M. - The decisive question is will the free world win in Asia and Africa. Today I could add Latin America. Will the free world realize that for these people freedom does not mean what it means to you and me. What these people want is a better society, a better standard of living, health and education. Above all they want to be treated as equals. Even when you give help you do not always become popular because just as important as what you give is how you give it.

The Peace Corps is a great idea and you will succeed in this if your people will go to it with a pioneering spirit and not with a spirit of superiority. The psychological point is more important than money or help. I am saying this on the basis of our own experience in working in these countries.

President - We were always suspects in Latin America, because we are a big power.

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P.M. - We are small country and they are not afraid of us. But also, because we are a young country, we have no hide-bound traditions. We do everything to solve our own needs. Even our army is not primarily for defense but for educating our citizens and for pioneering. Also half of our immigrants are from Asia and Africa.

P.M. mentioned Nachal and continued: Ghana wanted something like this and they built the Builders Brigade.<sup>1</sup> Also Burma, they sent some officers who learnt Hebrew for two months and then worked for a year on our farms. Back in Burma they built three villages based on their experience gained in our settlements. Now we have another 100 Burmese officers in Israel. There are many Africans in our settlements. We have an Afro-Asian Institute for cooperation in which they are very interested. Also we teach them elementary health needs.

The P.M. then referred to Gedna. Our whole spirit is not careerism but the pioneering spirit. Although we have no relations with India hundreds of Indians have come to see our settlements.

President - Why won't Nehru recognise you?

P.M. - I don't know. I can tell you what his excuse is. It is that he wants to mediate between us and the Arabs. I question this, but Nehru is a great man and a great man is entitled to be mistaken.<sup>1</sup> India is the only big democracy in Asia and this is due to Nehru. I am ready to pardon him.

The Africans cannot do what you are doing. It is too big. They come to us and our people go to them. In our own army we have officers of all different countries of origin. It is the same feeling of equality that we try to bring to Africa. An illiterate man who joins our army gets an education and after 2½ years he leaves quite a different man.

If you win over the African peoples the free world will win. The slogan of liberty alone is not enough. What these people want is dignity.

President - I have talked to our people about your work in Africa. It is most helpful.

P.M. - We could do more but we have our own problems.

President - You talked about the kibbutzim. How about Meyer Feldman - it would do him no harm to go to a kibbutz. After all you want all the Jewish fellows to go over there.

P.M. - We want only the best to go.

President - I think anyway that Feldman should stay here.

Feldman - This is a rather doubtful compliment.

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President - Your point about Africa is a good one. Perhaps in our public statements we emphasize the freedom part of it too much and do not put enough emphasis on the development side of it. Though we do of course emphasize the matter of national independence. Surely they want independence.

P.M. - Independence, yes. Khrushchev is now trying to invest a body of pro-colonialism. He cannot accuse you of being colonialists so he exploits such things as Alabama and Little Rock. The fact is that Russia is today the only imperialist power in the world. They are oppressing their Moslems in Asia and the European countries they have taken over. In the art of propaganda they are very good. Everything which helps communism is honest. The West must be more united and know more what the uncommitted world wants and needs. I was in Belgium last year, a month before the Congo became independent. They told me that 12,000 Belgians were staying on in the Congo to help the government. I asked myself how could people who for years had been used to giving orders help these people to be independent.

President - About the PCC. This body will soon be making approach to the countries in the area for a solution to the Arab refugee problem which will include some repatriation, resettlement in the Arab countries and the migration of Arab refugees to countries outside the Arab world. The PCC has approached the Secretary General who has been looking for some neutral person who will go to the area and report back. If the PCC cannot report progress we will get the trika. This PCC is better than any we could get.

P.M. - Any commission will fail. This present PCC or any other, because the Arab states do not care about the refugees.

President - The UAR?

P.M. - Yes. They don't care what happens to the refugees. They regard them simply as the best weapon to fight us. If they can succeed in getting the refugees back into Israel it would create a critical situation. We are surrounded on all sides and they can destroy us. This is what they want. If this settlement of the refugee problem is done as part of a peace settlement, then yes. We have received as many Jewish refugees from the Arab countries as there were Arab refugees from Palestine. These Arab refugees were refugees from Palestine and not from Israel. The P.M. detailed how the Arabs left Haifa, Tiberias and Safed, and also Jaffa 2 days before the State was proclaimed. When we proclaimed the State they were gone. Then there came the Arab invasion. The British told them that they would finish us in 10 days, but they were wrong. We have taken  $\frac{1}{2}$  million Jews from the Arab countries. I wish Morocco would let the Jews out. 150,000 Jews from Iraq came.

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Although they had lived in the country for 2500 years they were told to leave. The same happened in the Yemen. In 1951 we began to be responsible for the Arab refugees which were in Israeli territory, but the Arab States don't worry or care for their refugees.

President - Possibly they won't agree to anything realistic, but I would prefer that the responsibility for a failure should not appear to rest on Israel. Let's see what the Arabs say before you reject. We have trouble in the Congress on this problem. We provide 70% of the total UNRWA funds, but all we get is animosity against us. I fully recognise the problems but may be it is worth making a trial.

P.M. - It's always good to try.

President - Blessed is the peace maker.

P.M. - With peace it would be easy.

President - We have been attacked by the UAR Press especially on Cuba and I wrote to President Nasser explaining to him that the Cuban situation means to us. We are well aware of the difficulties. Maybe we cannot succeed. Then we will have a new PUG and we will have to reconsider our contribution.

President - I shall sum up what we have discussed:

1) On the missiles it is our desire not only because of our friendship for Israel, but as a matter of our interest, that Israel should not come into a position which will encourage aggression or invite attack. The situation needs continuous examination and I can assure you that we will do that.

2) On the guarantees I will see what the atmosphere is in Vienna. We may very well not get off the Berlin question. I will inform you if I see a genuine desire to lessen tension. One of the things I have in mind is to raise the question of limiting shipments of arms to Africa. We have a continuous interest in your work in Asia and Africa and we will continue to support that.

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P.M. - If I may I would like to raise some other questions not only about Israel but also Turkey and Persia. In Persia there is a delicate situation. There is a strong feeling for the monarchy but there is a great deal of corruption. Now they have a new government which apparently feels that they do not get enough support from you, not only material but political and spiritual support.

President - The last administration and our new administration have been spending a lot of time on Persia. They have an army of 200,000 whose sole function in my opinion, is to protect internal security. Obviously it cannot be used against Russia. If the Russians were to cross the frontier that would mean world war. Two weeks ago when they had some demonstrations there was even some question whether the army would respond favourably. Still, they always ask for more equipment for the army. Amini has decided to come out against corruption and realises the need for land reform. This Amini government represents the last hope. I completely agree in this. We shall do everything we can for him. We have discussed this in the National Security Council and we are making emergency funds available.

P.M. - Can I tell him that?

President - Yes, you can. I want the relations between our countries to be harmonious and I hope there will be less tension. We are very desirous of playing a helpful role.

P.M. - Let me say that I am not an anti-Arab. I want you to help them.

President - We want to retain our influence so that there would be less tension. There were attacks on the U.S. when we voted in the U.N. on this question of the property.

P.M. - Are you afraid of attacks?

President - Oh, no. We just want to do all we can to be helpful.

The last few moments of the conversation were held while the P.M. and the President were standing preparatory to saying goodbye. The name of de Gaulle was mentioned and there were some exchanges about him. The P.M. presented a gift to the President consisting of an old Latin book of travels on the Holy Land written by a member of the Radziwil family, the family to which the sister of Mrs. Kennedy is married. The President expressed great pleasure at this gift and asked the Prime Minister's permission to present it as a gift to the daughter of his sister-in-law whose christening he would be attending in London. He said that he would keep the dedicatory letter from the Prime Minister and asked the P.M. to write his name in the book so that the child would know from whom it

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had come. This the P.M. did.

The conversation ended after an hour and a half and the President accompanied the P.M. to the elevator.

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THE ATOMIC REACTOR

**Z.A.** About the Atomic Reactor, I had intended to say something on this, but meanwhile you have sent your people and I suppose you have their report. But if you have any questions on this I am ready to answer.

**PRESIDENT** - The report was very helpful. But a woman should not only be virtuous, she should appear to be virtuous. We must take away any excuse for the argument that what you are doing is connected with the proliferation of nuclear arms.

**Z.A.** I made a statement on this in the Knesset. Our biggest problem is water. Even after we get the water of the Jordan we will not have enough water. The only way is the desalination of the sea and for that we need cheap economic power. In Israel today power is more expensive than here. We have no coal and as yet not much oil. After ten or fifteen years, atomic power, which is now more expensive than conventional power, will be cheaper. I have discussed this with people like Babha of India and Blackett of England and they have told me that it will take ten years. But we must be ready for it. We must have the scientific know-how.

We were helped by the French Government in building this reactor. We are asked whether it is for peace. For the time being the only purposes are for peace. Not now but after three or four years we shall have a pilot plant for separation, which is needed anyway for a power reactor. There is no such intention now, nor for 4 or 5 years. But we will see what happens in the U.S. It does not depend on us. May be Russia won't give bombs to China or Egypt, but may be Egypt will develop them herself.

**PRESIDENT** - I appreciate the desalination matter. While we are very involved with you in the A.R., we don't want it to appear that Israel is preparing for atomic weapons. If that were to appear, the U.A.R. would not permit it to exist at that, but would try to do the same herself. Perhaps in the next five years atomic weapons will proliferate, but we don't want it to happen. The report of your people is a fine report and it would be helpful if we could get this information out.

**Z.A.** - You are free to do what you like with it. On the contrary, we are interested in your doing so.

**PRESIDENT** - The Arabs know that the U.S.A. and Israel are very close friends. It would be useful if we could have a report from a neutral scientist.

**Z.A.** - What do you mean by neutral?

**PRESIDENT** - To you think like Krushchev that no man can be neutral. Take Nehru.

**Z.A.** - Yes Nehru is neutral, though after his experience with China he is not so neutral.

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PERSONNEL - Yes Or Switzerland or Sweden, or Denmark. Would you  
object to our sending such a neutral scientist?

R.A.M. - Yes, if you wish.

Copy of Official Document from Israel's State Archives, declassified in May 1992, file:  
130.02/3294/7

TOP-SECRET  
For Addressee Only

Meeting of President Kennedy and Prime Minister Ben Gurion, Tuesday, May 30th, Waldorf Astoria Hotel, Suite 284, 4.45--6.16 pm

Present: The President  
The Prime Minister  
Mr. Meyer Feldman: Special Assistant, White House  
Mr. Philip Talbot: Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asia--  
State Department  
Mr. Avraham Herman: Ambassador of Israel

These minutes were taken by Mr. Herman

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