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Dept believes further approach to GOI leaders re Israel's atomic energy activities should be made and in view current GOI Cabinet crisis leaves to your judgment whether discussion with Ben Gurion or Golda Meir or both likely be most effective (EmbTel 590). Neither Dept nor other interested Washington agencies consider Ben Gurion's statements thus far satisfactory. His replies to your questions (EmbTel 577) appear evasive, e. g. re plutonium safeguards, failure to confide in President, reactor's power production capability, and inspection by visiting scientist. Such clearly apparent lack of candor difficult to reconcile with confidence which has traditionally characterized US-Israel relations.

In speaking to Ben Gurion and/or Mrs. Meir you should emphasize:

1. USG gratified by assurances given thus far re peaceful purposes Israel's atomic activities.
2. In order to assist in "stilling atmosphere", as Ambassador Harman requested, Dept issued its statement of December 21. We believe it has had some calming effect in Mid East area, although quite obviously Israel's neighbors continue to be deeply alarmed. We would not welcome new

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round of alarmist publicity.

3. Dept's statement has, however, not rpt not signified cessation legitimate USG interest in this matter.

4. USG policy is unequivocally opposed to proliferation of nuclear weapons capabilities. This policy based on US conviction that threats to peace will be intensified as nuclear weapons capabilities are proliferated. As Israelis must know, Mid East is particularly explosive tinder box.

5. In all honesty we must point out that Israel's lack of candor with US has aroused in many quarters suspicions and has occasioned disappointment. We hope Israel will act at earliest possible date to restore the confidence which should be cornerstone for our relations.

6. GOI can do this by providing clear and complete answers to such cogent and crucial questions as the following:

a) What are present GOI plans for disposing of plutonium which will be bred in new reactor

b) Will GOI agree to adequate safeguards with respect to plutonium produced?

c) Will GOI permit qualified scientists from IAEA or other friendly quarters visit new reactor? If so, what would be earliest date?

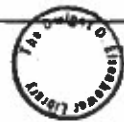
d) Is a third reactor in either the construction or planning stage?

e) Can Israel state categorically that it has no plans for producing nuclear weapons?

Since Ambassador Harman is currently in Israel, you may wish to inform him that Dept and other Washington agencies continue to have an urgent interest



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in this matter and that we hope he will be able to bring back to Washington with him a complete set of answers to questions such as those raised above. You should add that the Secretary will welcome a personal report from him at earliest possible opportunity following his return.

MERCHANT

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