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ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
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By J, NARA, Date 3-30-01

4 November 1968  
Refer to I-35993/68

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Negotiations with Israel - F-4 and Advanced Weapons

Participants:

Israeli Side

Ambassador of Israel, Lieutenant General Yitzhak Rabin  
Minister Shlomo Argov, Israeli Embassy  
Brigadier General Hod, Commander, Israeli Defense Force Air Force  
Brigadier General David Carmon, Defense and Armed Forces Attache  
Mr. J. Shapiro, Director, Ministry of Defense Mission, New York

United States Side

Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), Paul C. Warnke  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), Harry H. Schwartz  
Deputy Director, NESAs Region (ISA), Robert J. Murray

Time: 1400 - 1445, 4 November 1968

Place: Assistant Secretary Warnke's Office, Pentagon

Ambassador Rabin opened the conversation by referring to his meeting on 30 October with Ambassador Hart, in which Hart had asked Rabin to write a proposed Memorandum of Understanding incorporating the provisions Israel considered necessary to the F-4 sale. This was written and delivered to Ambassador Hart. "We put in it what we thought was necessary, following the precedent of the prior agreement (A-4 aircraft)." Last Friday, 1 November, Rabin said he received a call from Department of State to the effect that "in principal, the answer is yes" with regard to Israel's request for F-4s and that he was to get in touch with Mr. Warnke. Ambassador Rabin said that today he would like to get agreement on how we proceed but not go into details.

Mr. Warnke said that he would like at the outset to set forth the United States' position. The President agrees in principal to the sale. It is a difficult decision, not because we are not interested in Israel's security,

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but precisely because we are interested. Heretofore, we have avoided becoming the principal arms supplier to Israel. Wherever possible we have urged that Israel acquire its arms from other Western countries. We felt that this was to our mutual benefit for it lessened the risk of US-USSR confrontation in the Middle East and therefore lessened the dangers to the security of the United States and Israel. We would prefer to continue that policy; however, the Europeans apparently have opted out, and the French particularly seem reluctant to supply the Mirage aircraft Israel has purchased.

Mr. Warnke stressed that with a decision to go ahead on the sale of F-4 aircraft we will have a different set of circumstances concerning our supply relationship to Israel. We will henceforth become the principal arms supplier to Israel, involving us even more intimately with Israel's security situation and involving more directly the security of the United States.

Mr. Warnke reminded Ambassador Rabin that Secretary Rusk had talked with Foreign Minister Eban about the problems and the dangers of strategic missiles and nuclear weapons. Mr. Warnke referred specifically to the paragraph in the standard sales contract which permitted cancellation "under unusual and compelling circumstances"; he suggested that Israeli acquisition of strategic missiles and nuclear weapons would comprise such circumstances. Mr. Warnke told Ambassador Rabin that because the security of the United States was clearly involved we must seek from the Government of Israel certain assurances:

- (1) that Israel will not test or deploy strategic missiles,
- (2) that Israel will not develop, manufacture, or otherwise acquire strategic missiles or nuclear weapons,
- (3) that Israel will sign and ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

At a subsequent point in the conversation, Mr. Warnke mentioned the inspection arrangement at Dimona as a precedent that might be required here.

Mr. Warnke noted that we had not sought such specific assurances in our prior agreements because, based on the information we had at that time, these developments were not imminent. Our present information, however, indicates that Israel is on the verge of nuclear weapons and missiles capability. This development would seriously and adversely affect the security interests of the United States; it involves the Soviet Union and risks a US-USSR confrontation; it dramatically changes the situation in the area.

(Ambassador Rabin did not dispute in any way our information on Israel's nuclear or missile capability, nor did he comment directly on the assurances we requested. He did not seem particularly surprised or upset at Mr. Warnke's presentation. He referred to the fact that the Israeli position on the question of Israeli nuclear and missile programs had been conveyed to Ambassador Barbour.

Ambassador Rabin observed that this question (of missiles and nuclear weapons) had been raised two weeks ago, and that an answer was given by the Israeli Government to the United States Embassy in Israel. "I don't have anything to add to my Government's position." Rabin said he was asked to draft a

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Memorandum of Understanding which he had done and which we have. Rabin said that "if you wish to suggest changes or additions to that memorandum you of course may do so." Rabin remarked that, when he saw Secretary Rusk on Sunday, the Secretary said that the American acceptance in principal "did not mean that we accept your draft Memorandum of Understanding."

Commenting more generally, Ambassador Rabin said that Israel did not come to the United States for military equipment when it could go elsewhere; with other governments Israel did not have the problem of "conditions" that it has with the United States. In any case, we do not see, said Rabin, that your selling us 50 Phantoms changes things appreciably.

Mr. Warnke said that it is not just 50 Phantoms, but 50 Phantoms plus 100 Skyhawks plus the great variety of other equipment that Israel is requesting that makes the policy we are entering upon a distinct change from our prior policy. Nevertheless, the United States is interested in doing what is necessary to assist Israel. Opinions vary on how best to do this but our goal is the same. It is for this reason that we are so concerned with Israel's missile and nuclear plans and intentions and this is why we need to "up-date" your assurance to us on these matters.

Mr. Warnke told Ambassador Rabin that we would prepare by tomorrow for his review a revised Memorandum of Understanding incorporating the kinds of assurance we require. Mr. Warnke asked if there were other questions that Ambassador Rabin would like to speak about today.

Ambassador Rabin said that he would like to call to our attention the current Israeli intelligence appreciation of the build-up of Soviet aircraft in Egypt and Syria. He said that the figures General Weizman had presented us in September 1967 had proven to be entirely too low. The inventories that Weizman had projected for those two countries by 1970 had in fact already been exceeded on 1 November 1968. The Ambassador undertook to provide details separately. Rabin went on to say that a number of technical terms needed going into, for example, Israel would like a certain number -- the more the better -- of F-4s delivered in the first half of 1969 (he later put the number at 25 aircraft). He attributed the urgency to "what was happening on the other side." Rabin said that they would like credit arrangements if possible, preferably on the same terms as the first Skyhawk sale (10 per cent down, 3 1/2 per cent interest, 10 years repayment). Rabin said they would like the F-4E configuration generally, but wish to include in the 50 aircraft 6 RF-4Es. Ambassador Rabin and General Hod asked if they could begin discussions on the F-4E with the Air Force. Mr. Warnke said he would inform them when this was possible.

Prepared by:

R. J. Murray  
ROBERT J. MURRAY

Approved by:

Paul R. Warnke  
The Assistant Secretary  
of Defense (ISA)

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