

INCOMING TELEGRAM

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Control: 13708
Rec'd: December 24, 1960
4:50 p.m.

Info FROM: Tel Aviv

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TO: Secretary of State

NO: 577, December 24, 6 p.m. (SECTION 1 OF 2)



NIACT
EYES ONLY FOR SECRETARY

Re DEPTTEL EYES ONLY 470

In call on Prime Minister December 24 at his home in Tel Aviv I handed him President's Christmas card (for which he expressed real appreciation); raised main points DEPTTEL 474 re Mali; and then turned to serious discussion Israel's research reactor pursuant to DEPTTEL 470.

I assured Prime Minister USG welcomed assurances which Ambassador Harman had already conveyed and his own public statement in Knesset re peaceful purposes of this reactor and Israel's atomic energy program. I noted USG did not wish to prolong or exaggerate this issue and that Assistant Secretary Jones had also said this to Ambassador Harman, as he no doubt knew.

I made point of stressing President's deep interest in the Atoms For Peace program that he initially presented to GA and USG's grave worry over possible proliferation of nuclear weapons. I noted reports re possibility Communist China might get atomic weapons a danger that reflects our sense of urgency which led Secretary to make crystal clear our concern over developments in this field. Further, I reiterated Secretary's remarks (DEPTTEL 464) to Harman urging full statement safeguards be applied to any plutonium produced by reactor and referred to Secretary's mention of Israel's affirmative vote on IAEA safeguards at September general conference.

In response, Prime Minister expressed mild irritation over publication in states of so much data re project. Smiling, he said "Why in States is everything being told everybody?" Ben-Gurion then said he thought Department spokesman Lincoln White had made a "very

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-2- 577, December 24, 6 p.m. (SECTION 1 OF 2) from Tel Aviv

a "very decent statement" December 22 that should set things right. I noted that Department had only made initial statement after TV report and following radio Moscow charges that US aiding Israeli nuclear weapons program.

Ben Gurion said he was very sorry that he had not been able to tell President Eisenhower of this project during his recent visit to Washington, and said that were it not so close to end of Eisenhower administration, he would wish to give personal account to President, whom he had long known and admired. (I indicated I would be glad to transmit anything he wished.).

Ben Gurion then recounted history of Negev project. Several years ago he had discussed possibility of atomic power with experts including Bhabha of India, who advised him that in 10 or 15 years atomic power might become cheap enough to be practicable and might be produced from materials available in Israel by use of heavy water and phosphates. If so, this would help solve Israel's great problem of developing Negev where water, manpower and electric power were all badly needed.

Experts told him he should begin then to prepare technicians to be ready when cheaper source of power possible. On this advice Negev reactor program commenced. It had to be kept secret, he said, because foreign private companies that participated in it were in fear of Arab boycott and requested assurances that their work in Israel would not be made known and thus endanger their operations in Arab countries (He did not name companies). He said great pity project had been made public because work not finished.

Ben-Gurion stated in answer to my question that heavy water was being produced here only experimentally.

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Control: 13709

Rec'd: December 24, 1966
5:32 p.m.

Info

FROM: Tel Aviv

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 577, December 24, 6 p.m. (SECTION 2 OF 2)

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NIACT

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He added uranium could be extracted experimentally and not in quantity from Israel's phosphates from which it was now being wasted in process of fertilizer manufacture. In answer to other questions, he said French were supplying certain materials.

When I asked if reactor would produce power, he said: "No. It will be built for research and to train technicians. Maybe later but I don't know."

Emphasizing that development of own atomic power could be great help for Israel's economy, he said he hoped Israel "could get help from States and maybe from England and perhaps France". He stated project was now costing about four or five million dollars a year.

I referred to Lewis Jones remarks to Harman (DEPTEL 471) about the interest and growing concern in the area over Israel's atomic development, and said that Jones had speculated whether there might be any feasibility in having a scientist take a look at this project. I also told the Prime Minister that I had listened to Nasser's speech last night and quoted a rough English translation from it to effect that "if we are sure Israel is making the atomic bomb, then that is the beginning of the war between us; then we must fight even if we must mobilize four million men and destroy their bases." Here I asked Prime Minister what in his view best way might be of alleviating concern. He said, "I think statement issued by Mr. White yesterday is the best thing."

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-2- 577, December 24, 6 p.m. (SECTION 2 OF 2) from Tel Aviv

Then Prime Minister remarked "Nasser will attack when he thinks he can destroy Israel. It is not easy for him to mobilize four million men." He added Nasser was frustrated in all his ambitions. Having failed in Arab world, Moslem world and Africa, he was leaning more and more upon Russians. Nasser, he said, seemed hopeless for west, but later Ben-Gurion said there might be some chance and quoted Lincoln, "You can't fool all the people all the time".

At end of conversation, I again mentioned Secretary's reference with Harman to full statement on safeguards over any plutonium. Secretary had urged safeguards be applied any plutonium produced in reactor. Prime Minister said, "We are still 3 or 4 years from anything called plutonium. When we get to that point we won't be behind any power in world in respect to safeguards".

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