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177. Memorandum of Discussion at the 470th Meeting of the National Security Council, December 8, 1960¹ ([#fn1](#))

December 8, 1960

[Here follow a paragraph listing the participants at the meeting and items 1–3.]

4. Significant World Developments Affecting U.S. Security

[Here follows discussion of unrelated subjects.]

Mr. Dulles reported that Israel was constructing, with French assistance, a nuclear complex in the Negev. This complex probably included a reactor capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium. [3 lines of source text not declassified] The French were apparently supplying equipment and training to the Israelis and were flying in the necessary fuel elements. Apparently the Israelis intend to announce shortly that a new university is being established with a small reactor, exclusively of Israeli design, and intended solely for scientific research. CIA and AEC experts believe, however, that the Israeli nuclear complex cannot be solely for peaceful purposes. The USSR and the Arab countries will undoubtedly interpret the Israeli nuclear facility as intended for the production of weapons. The Arab reaction to the Israeli facility will be particularly severe. Secretary Herter said [41/2 lines of source text not declassified]. He intended to talk to the Israeli Ambassador soon and point out the serious implications of this development. The fact that the facility cost between \$40 and \$80 million at a time when we were providing aid to Israel raises serious questions.

The Vice President asked what other countries had similar nuclear facilities. Mr. Dulles said the Communist Chinese were attempting to develop a nuclear capability. France, of course, was also making efforts in the weapons field. Germany was talking about the centrifuge process but he did not know of any plant in Germany. Secretary Herter said India was contemplating a large-scale reactor, the contract for construction of which would be open to competitive bidding. The U.S. has insisted on inspection whenever we have helped build a nuclear reactor. If India throws the construction of its reactor to competitive bidding with no strings attached, France or the USSR may be able to obtain the construction contract because they do not insist on safeguards. Secretary Herter wondered whether Israel would be willing to apply safeguards to its nuclear facilities. He then inquired whether the photographs which Mr. Dulles had passed around the table could be used publicly. Mr. Dulles said he would like to check with the Army, which had obtained the photographs. Secretary Douglas believed there was no risk in using the photographs since they could

have been taken from a road which runs near the facility.

Mr. Scribner pointed out that Israel might have been able to build this expensive nuclear facility because of funds which reach that country from Jewish charitable organizations in the U.S. These contributions are deductible from U.S. income taxes and the Treasury has experienced difficulties in the past because some of the charitable funds are diverted to government operations in Israel. Mr. Scribner felt the implications of this problem were rather far-reaching. Mr. Dulles said he believed the U.S. might have provided Israel with some kind of reactor. He had been told the Israeli facility could produce nuclear power. He also noted that President-Elect Kennedy had been briefed on this matter and that the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy would be briefed the next day.

The Vice President wondered whether a by-product of this problem would not be increased pressure for an agreement on nuclear testing. If Israel acquired a nuclear capability of some kind, the "fourth country problem" would certainly be brought home to everyone. People will ask if Israel can do it, why not Cuba? In response to a question from the Vice President, Mr. Dulles said the U.S. had known about the construction of a facility in Israel for some time but had only recently identified it as a nuclear facility. The Vice President believed that the construction of nuclear facilities by "fourth countries" should be a major intelligence target since such facilities posed a danger even in friendly countries. Mr. Dulles assured the Vice President that CIA operatives were constantly on the watch for nuclear facilities. He added that Israel had the technical competence to build and operate a nuclear facility but had to get the necessary material from abroad.

[Here follow discussion of unrelated subjects and the remaining agenda items.]

Marion W. Boggs

¹ ([#fnref1](#)) Source: Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, NSC Records. Top Secret. Drafted by Boggs.
