



# NUCLEAR RIVALRY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

HOW ISRAEL CREATED THE NUCLEAR  
PROBLEM

by multiple authors

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**The U.S. Discovery of Israel's Secret Nuclear Project**

**Israeli Cover Stories about the Dimona Reactor Dismayed Top Level Officials Who Saw a "Clearly Apparent Lack of Candor"**

**U.S. Embassy Telegram Quotes Ben-Gurion Aide That It Was a "Stupid Mistake" by Israel to Cloak the Nuclear Project in Secrecy**

**To Prevent Military Uses of the Facility, U.S. Officials Believed the International Atomic Energy Agency Should Monitor Dimona (It Never Has)**

**Today's Posting Inaugurates the National Security Archive's Special Web Site on Israeli Nuclear History**

**National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No.510**

**Posted - April 15, 2015**

**Avner Cohen and William Burr, editors**

**Washington, D.C., April 15, 2015**—The U.S. government first learned of Israel's secret nuclear program at Dimona from an American corporate official talking to U.S. diplomats in Tel Aviv during mid-summer 1960, according to a declassified document published today for the first time by the National Security Archive, the Nuclear Proliferation

International History Project, and the Center for Nonproliferation Studies of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. Other documents published today detail the discovery of the secret project that some in the U.S. government believed from the very start aimed at a weapons capability; the U.S. debates over Israel's lack of candor; and U.S. government efforts to pressure the Israelis to answer key questions about the nature of the Dimona project.

This "discovery," which came as the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower was drawing to a close, caused apprehension in Washington by raising concern about regional stability and nuclear proliferation, but it also produced annoyance because Israeli officials at all levels repeatedly provided less than credible answers to U.S. questions about Dimona. Thus, in September 1960, when embassy officials asked about a new construction site when they were on a helicopter ride nearby, an adroit Israeli official, Addy Cohen, improvised a story to keep the secret: it was the site of a textile factory, he said; a story that was not wholly false because there was a textile plant near Dimona. An

#### [Interview with Addy Cohen](#)

An interview with Mr. Addy Cohen, a retired official from Israel's Treasury Ministry, conducted by [Ori Rabinowitz](#), a post-doctoral fellow at Tel Aviv University.

Part of the puzzle about the textile plant cover story is how it came about. While we know that Addy Cohen, the director of the Foreign Aid Office at the Treasury Ministry, used that description when guiding U.S. Ambassador Ogden Reid and some of his staff on a helicopter tour of the Negev in September 1960, the documentary trail has its limits. Cohen, who has just turned 87, and is living outside Tel Aviv, recalls the episode vividly. In a series of written and oral exchanges with the editors of this e-book in recent weeks, he has clarified further what happened.

As a senior official, Cohen was aware of the Dimona project and of its utmost secrecy. The issue of Dimona "was discussed in one of the Treasury Ministry executive meetings under [Minister Levi] Eshkol," he wrote us. The helicopter tour covered various development projects that the U.S. supported, and they were on their way from the Dead Sea. "I was not prepared to Ambassador Reid's question [about the Dimona site] as we flew far north of the structure. I ad libbed by referring to Trostler, the Jerusalemite architect [a relative of Cohen's wife], who actually designed a textile plants" at Dimona.

Surprised by Reid's query, Cohen improvised an answer that was not completely false. In retrospect, as he wrote on March 5, 2015, "It may have transpired that I was the first one who referred to the project as a 'textile plant' but I can assure you that it was not planned.

Interview with Addy Cohen detailing the episode appears in this posting for the first time.

Documents published in this collection shed light on a particularly notable intelligence failure: how Washington missed warning signs that the Israelis had a nuclear project underway, but also how the U.S. belatedly realized what the Israelis were doing, and how Eisenhower and his senior advisers reacted to this discovery. Among the documents are:

- The June 1959 Israel-Norway secret agreement providing for the sale of Norwegian heavy water to Israel (through the United Kingdom), transmitted by Oslo Embassy political officer Richard Kerry (father of Secretary of State John Kerry).
- Reports about information from a then-covert source — University of Michigan nuclear engineering professor Henry Gomberg — who learned that the Israelis had a secret nuclear reactor project that involved experiments with plutonium.
- A telegram from the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv reporting on Finance Ministry official Addy Cohen's statement that "we've been misbehaving," and one by an unidentified official close to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion that the secrecy surrounding Dimona was unjustifiable and that it was "a stupid mistake on the part of Israel."
- Reports by U.S. Ambassador Ogden Reid on conversations with Ben-Gurion.
- A State Department message to the embassy in Tel Aviv conveying irritation that the responses of the Israeli government showed a "lack of candor."
- Messages about a role for the International Atomic Energy Agency in inspecting and safeguarding Dimona.

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## **The Eisenhower Administration and the Discovery of Dimona: March 1958 –January 1961**

*By Avner Cohen and William Burr*

In the last months of 1960 as the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower was coming to a close, the U.S. government discovered that Israel had been building, with French assistance, a secret nuclear reactor near Dimona in the Negev Desert that could give Israel a nuclear weapons potential. The discovery caused apprehension within the Eisenhower administration by invoking

concerns about regional stability and nuclear proliferation, but it also produced annoyance because Israeli officials at all levels provided less than credible answers to U.S. questions about Dimona.

One episode that helped create a sense of deception was that, in response to initial U.S. official questions about the construction site, the Israelis said it would be a textile factory. Over the years the "textile factory" story has acquired legendary status, but exactly when the story came about has been a mystery. But recently unearthed U.S. government documents — an embassy telegram and a memorandum by the Deputy Chief of Mission — help solve this historical puzzle. They show that during a helicopter flight in September 1960, with American Ambassador Ogden Reid and others of his staff on board, not far from the reactor site, Ambassador Reid (or one of the travelers) asked what the big construction site was. Their host, Addy Cohen, a senior Treasury Ministry official, replied, "Why, that's a textile plant." In December 1960, when the Dimona issue was publicly exposed, Cohen was asked why he had said "textile factory." He responded: "that was our story at the time." Cohen acknowledged that "we have been misbehaving" by keeping Dimona secret, but justified the project as a "deterrent" against Arab neighbors.

Today the National Security Archive, the Nuclear Proliferation International History Project and the Center for Nonproliferation Studies of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey publish for the first time these two items and other declassified documents on the "discovery" of Dimona. The documents provide new perspectives on how the Eisenhower administration learned about the secret reactor project, how it reacted to the discovery, and how the Israelis responded. Among the findings are these:

- The initial "discovery" by the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv of the French-Israeli reactor project was probably in late July 1960, when a U.S. corporate official learned about it from an Israeli oil executive and told U.S. diplomats that the site would be a power reactor. This is the earliest known reference to Dimona.
- The admission by French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville on December 16 to Secretary of State Christian Herter that France had helped Israel build the reactor, a "replica of [the] Marcoule plant." He also told Herter that under the bilateral agreement, France would supply Israel the raw materials and receive any plutonium produced by the plant. In reply to Herter's question about the plant's financing, Couve said that he "assumed the money came from [the United States]"
- Former Treasury Ministry official Addy Cohen admitted the "textile plant" story in response to questions on a helicopter tour [See above and sidebar].
- An unidentified official close to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, according to an Embassy telegram, told the Canadian ambassador that the secrecy surrounding Dimona was unjustifiable and that it was "a stupid mistake on the part of Israel." Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs G. Lewis Jones agreed: It was "stupid of them" and an "unnecessary ... Israeli caper."
- The financial aspects of the Dimona project, i.e., cost, financing, and the role of U.S. money—through both the diversion of U.S. government aid and the use of tax-

- deductible individual charities — played an important role in the Eisenhower administration's internal deliberations on Dimona. Washington considered applying, but apparently did not use, the power to withhold economic assistance as pressure on Israel.
- When the U.S. started asking questions about Dimona, and then when the issue was leaked to the press, an irritated Prime Minister Ben-Gurion asked Ambassador Ogden Reid: "Why in [the] States is everything being told [to] everybody?" Ben-Gurion stuck to the new Israeli cover story, namely, that the Dimona reactor was for peaceful purposes only, and for the economic development of the Negev in particular— no more than a step towards the building of nuclear power stations and the production of electric power, a badly needed resource.
  - A State Department message to the embassy in Tel Aviv conveyed a sense of irritation with the responses of the Israeli government: Ben-Gurion's explanations "appear evasive" and the "clearly apparent lack of candor [is] difficult to reconcile with [the] confidence which had traditionally characterized U.S.-Israel relations." The Department wanted more questions asked and more detailed and frank answers from Ben-Gurion.
  - In June 1959 Israel and Norway signed a secret agreement providing for Norway to sell heavy water to Israel (through the United Kingdom). According to the U.S. embassy first secretary in Oslo, Richard Kerry (father of Secretary of State John Kerry), disclosure of the agreement could be embarrassing to the Norwegian government in light of its efforts to play the role of an "honest broker" in international conflicts, including in the Middle East.

Also published in this collection are important documents that have been available in previous National Security Archive postings, but are a significant part of the record of the discovery of Dimona, including:

- A Special National Intelligence Estimate — SNIE 100-8-60 from 8 December 1960 — that formally determined that "Israel is engaged in construction of a nuclear reactor complex in the Negev near Beersheba" and "plutonium production for weapons is at least one major purpose of this effort." The SNIE estimated "that Israel will produce some weapons grade plutonium in 1963-64 and possibly as early as 1962." A significant portion of the SNIE is still classified.
- President Eisenhower's meeting with top advisers on 19 December 1960 to discuss the Dimona problem, ponder the issues raised by Israeli fundraising in the United States, and discuss plans to encourage Israel to open up Dimona to visits by U.S. or reliable foreign scientists and to subject the reactor to International Atomic Energy Agency inspections. Some portions of this meeting record are also still classified.
- The post-mortem on SNIE 100-8-60 ordered by the U.S. Intelligence Board whereby the intelligence community tried to determine what pieces of information it had missed and to learn lessons from the intelligence failure.

The Eisenhower administration's "discovery" during the last months of 1960 that Israel was secretly building a large nuclear complex at Dimona was a belated one indeed. It occurred more than five years after Israel had made a secret national commitment to create a nuclear program



aiming at providing an option to produce nuclear weapons; more than three years after Israel had signed its secret comprehensive nuclear bargain with France; and two years or more after Israel had begun the vast excavation and construction work at the Dimona site.

The tardiness of the discovery was a major blunder, what is called in our times an intelligence failure. In comparative terms, it was probably as severe as (or more so than) the failures to anticipate the Indian nuclear tests of in 1974 and 1998. Some of the documents included in this book provide clues as to why the discovery was delayed and the roots and causes of the intelligence failure.

What amounted to an intelligence breakdown by the United States was a tremendous counterintelligence success for Israel. The U.S. bungle enabled Israel to buy precious time for the highly vulnerable Dimona project. One could argue that had the United States discovered Dimona two years earlier, perhaps even a year earlier, that the young and fragile undertaking might not have survived. Early political pressure from the United States on the two foreign suppliers, France and Norway, might have terminated it at the very start.

The documents presented here reveal how surprised and angry the Eisenhower administration was when it learned about Dimona — and yet how circumspect Washington was in its reaction to the discovery. There was a huge gap between what senior U.S. officials said to each other about Dimona and what they said to the Israelis. On the one hand, the Americans were convinced that the evidence they had amassed indicated that it was plutonium production-oriented project with weapons potential that posed a significant proliferation risk. They were irritated that the Israelis were trying to pull the wool over their eyes with all manner of evasive answers and misleading stories. Apparently they had many doubts about Ben-Gurion's new cover story as well. On the other hand, the administration masked its anger and suspicions; opting for a cautious approach, it chose not to be confrontational but to confine itself largely to: 1) seeking answers about Dimona and Israel's intentions, and 2) encouraging Israel to accept visits by U.S. scientists and consent to applying International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards to Dimona, as away to constrain Israeli freedom of action. There are hints that U.S. diplomats warned the Israelis that U.S. economic aid could be jeopardized, but with only weeks left in office the Eisenhower administration was in no position to coerce its ally over the issue.

To appreciate the full historical context of the American intelligence failure we need to say a little bit about the Dimona project itself. In 1955, soon after David Ben-Gurion came back to power as Israel's prime minister and minister of defense, he launched a secret feasibility initiative to determine



whether, and how, Israel could This and the three other photographs of the construction

build a nuclear infrastructure to support a program aiming at producing nuclear explosives. Ben-Gurion delegated that difficult task to a young (32 years of age) and highly ambitious lieutenant, Shimon Peres, whose formal position was then the director general of the Ministry of Defense. Within three years, from 1955 to 1958, Peres did almost the impossible: he managed to transform the idea of a national nuclear program from a vague vision of the future into a real technological project in the making.

Unlike the chair of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC), Professor David Ernst Bergmann, who preached self-reliance, Peres' overall philosophy was that Israel must not (and cannot) reinvent the wheel and therefore must find a foreign supplier who could provide the most comprehensive nuclear package possible, one suited for a weapons-oriented program.[\[1\]](#)

Those three years were filled with internal deliberations, debates and planning. Often different courses of action were examined simultaneously, on parallel or even conflicting tracks. At least three countries were considered at one time or another to be the foreign supplier: the United States, France, Norway and, to a limited extent, the United Kingdom. In historical perspective, it appears that by 1958, the project's international master plan had become firmly drawn: France would be the foreign

site near Dimona in the Negev desert for Israel's then-secret nuclear reactor were taken during the last months of 1960. According to the U.S. Intelligence Board post-mortem (See [Document 27A](#)), the British and U.S. military attachés took photos and these could be from either source. The plainly visible reactor dome undermined Israeli claims that a textile factory was under construction. These images of the reactor site, some of them originally classified secret or confidential, are located in State Department records at the National Archives. (Record Group 59, Records of the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Outer Space, General Records Relating to Atomic Energy, 1948-62, box 501, Country File Z1.50 Israel f. Reactors 1960)

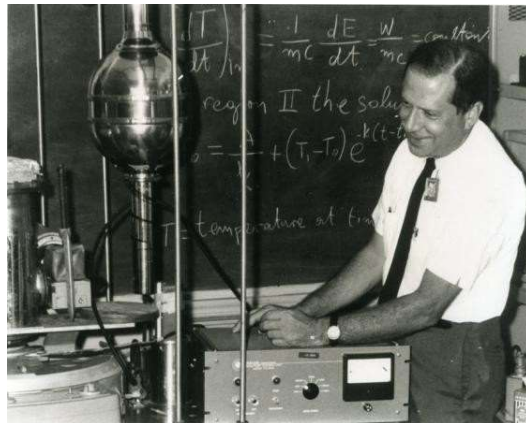
- [Photo1](#)
- [Photo2](#)
- [Photo3](#)
- [Photo4](#)



President Eisenhower and Israel Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion during the latter's visit in March 1960 to the United States.

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supplier, Norway would provide the heavy water and possibly the backup in case the French card went wrong, and the United States would provide a small peaceful package, under "Atoms of Peace," that could serve as the camouflage for the whole project, mostly as a way to conceal Israel's real achievement—Dimona—from the United States.



Henry Gomberg, Professor of Nuclear Engineering at the University of Michigan, shown at the laboratory during the 1950s, several years before his fall November 1960 trip to Israel where he made discoveries about the Dimona reactor (photo courtesy of Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor).

This raises the issue of secrecy. The story of Dimona is one of a huge secret. Secrecy was essential in order to shield and insulate the highly vulnerable, newly born, project from a hostile outside. At the very core, of course, it is an Israeli secret - the largest, most comprehensive and longest-held secret Israel has ever generated. However, it is more than an Israeli secret; Israel had partners in this venture. The prime partner was the chief foreign supplier, France; the second was Norway, in concert with the British.

And then there was the United States. In a sense, the secrecy surrounding Dimona was aimed primarily against the United States. After all, of all the nations involved, the U.S. posed the greatest threat to the Israeli program. Since the time of the Baruch Plan in 1946 the United States had been on the record opposing the spread of nuclear weapons. Washington helped to create the IAEA in 1957 — the very same year the Dimona deal was signed — and since then it



Under Secretary of State Robert Murphy swearing in Ogden Reid, the newly-appointed U.S. ambassador to Israel, 7 June 1959 (photo from NARA Still Pictures Division, RG 59 SO).

had promoted the creation of an international safeguards system. Should the Dimona secret have been compromised, the United States would have likely exercised pressure on France either to terminate the project altogether or at least to submit it to international safeguards.

The documents in this e-book involve Israel's nuclear relations with the United States, France and Norway. What follows is some brief background on Israel's efforts with each of them:



Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs G. Lewis Jones, who wrote to Ambassador Reid that "it was stupid" of the Israelis to undertake the secret reactor project. (photo from NARA Still Pictures Division, RG 59 SO).

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Addy Cohen (at the left) with Teddy Kollek, Director General of the Prime Minister's Office and later, Mayor of Jerusalem.

- **The United States.** On 12 July 1955, Israel was the second country to sign a general agreement with the United States for peaceful nuclear cooperation under "Atoms for Peace." Initially, the leaders of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission [IAEC] thought that American assistance could be the starting point for a largely indigenous Israeli nuclear program. Consistent with this vision, during 1955-56, IAEC Chairman Bergmann tried to find out whether the United States would provide assistance to build a "real reactor" — that is, a 10 MW natural uranium/heavy water reactor — but also to provide 10 tons of heavy water. Bergman made a formal request in July 1956 through a letter to AEC Chairman Lewis Strauss. In September the AEC notified Israel that it could be done but only under the aegis of a new bilateral nuclear power agreement which would require a more rigorous safeguards agreement than the original 1955 bilateral research accord. When Israel asked why, it was told that "plutonium production capabilities" necessitated stricter controls. When it became apparent the United States would insist on strict safeguards, Israel dropped its probe altogether.

A year later, however, in 1957, Israel returned to the original U.S. "Atoms for Peace" offer to construct a small 1 MW swimming pool-type reactor, to be designed and installed by American Machines and Foundry (AMF) Atomics. The contract was signed on 20 March 1957 and in December of that year the long-awaited proposal was submitted to the USAEC by AMF on behalf of Israel for the Nachal Soreq (Rubin) site. Finally, on 19 March 1958, Israel signed a contract with AMF, expecting that the reactor startup date would be 15 months later. Construction on the Soreq site had begun in January 1958 and the small reactor reached criticality in a public ceremony in June 1960, six months prior to the discovery of Dimona.<sup>[2]</sup> Unlike Dimona, however, the Soreq ("Atoms for Peace") reactor became subject to IAEA safeguards beginning in the mid-1960s.

- **France.** By early 1956, as French-Israeli military relations intensified, Peres became convinced that France could evolve into Israel's foreign nuclear supplier and acted accordingly. But it was the nationalization of the Suez Canal that summer which created the political opening for a French-Israeli nuclear deal. In September 1956 the French Atomic Energy Commission and the IAEC reached an agreement in principle for the sale of a small EL type research reactor to Israel. A month later, as a side issue at the end of the secret Sevres conference (October 22-24) (site of the "collusion" that led to the Suez campaign), the nuclear deal received top-level political approval. The 1956 deal, however, was quite limited in size and scope; it also did not include a chemical separation plant and related reprocessing technology.

It was in the context of the Suez campaign itself, when all three participants were subject to Soviet nuclear threats, that France reinforced its own earlier (1954) decision to become a nuclear power and agreed to help Israel to do the same. With France making its own nuclear decisions it became easier for Peres to be more explicit about the package that Israel actually wanted. The small EL-102 reactor that the CEA had planned for Israel in the fall of 1956—similar to the experimental EL318MW in Saclay—was upgraded to a large

plutonium-producing reactor of generally the same order as the G-1 reactor at Marcoule. Following a year of highly intense discussions and negotiations in France, on 30 October 1957 Peres finally signed the Dimona package, which included both hardware and technological aid. In the wake of widespread rumors of French-Israeli nuclear cooperation in early 1958, U.S. embassy officials reported that Israel had plans to build an "experimental" reactor but the State Department did not investigate this further (See [Documents 1A-B](#)).[3]

- **Norway.** Beginning in 1955, Israeli AEC Chair Bergmann pressed his government to obtain 20 tons of heavy water cheaply and, if possible, without safeguards. Outside the United States, the Norwegian company Norsk Hydro was the only available producer of heavy water. In early 1956, Israel made a request to the United States but also approached Norway, informally via political channels, as to whether and when it could supply Israel with 20 tons of heavy water. Norway's initial reply was that, due to current orders, it would be impossible to do so before the end of 1960. When the approach to Washington became hopeless, Israel grew more interested in the Norwegian supply. In August 1956, Bergmann wrote his friend Gunnar Randers, the director of the Norwegian Institute of for Atomic Energy, with a formal request to purchase 10 tons of heavy water. Randers responded noncommittally: supply was short but there was a "good chance" for a deal later on.

Negotiations between Israel and Norway intensified in 1957-58, at the time that the Dimona deal was negotiated and signed. In a letter Randers wrote in August 1957 to Fredrik Moller, the director of NORATOM, a newly established company aimed at promoting the Norwegian nuclear industry, he explained that Israel needed the heavy water for a 40 MW "production reactor" fueled by natural uranium. As there were political and logistic difficulties with the Israeli order, to make it more attractive Randers presented it in the context of a larger nuclear cooperation agreement between NORATOM and the IAEC. In addition, to expedite the deal it became a three-party transaction: Israel purchased heavy water from NORATOM that had been sold and transferred two years earlier to Britain, but became surplus for them. The heavy water was shipped directly from the UK to Israel, without safeguards, as the issue of safeguards was left to the Norwegians. The paper record indicates that Randers was willing to be "creative" on controls, but the Norwegian Foreign Ministry insisted on safeguards to ascertain "peaceful use." After long discussions Israel gave up on the question of safeguards and on 25 February 1959 the two countries exchanged documents on the heavy water sale with provisions to ensure that the use was peaceful. A few months later the Norwegian Foreign Ministry informed a U.S. AEC representative about the bilateral agreement, assuring him that it included safeguards and inspection rights (See [Documents2, 20](#)).[4]

The discoveries of the French and Norwegian roles in the Israeli nuclear project were a revelation to the Eisenhower administration but it was even more surprised to discover that it already had

in its possession clues that had not been followed up until it was too late. The documents below demonstrate how, during the short time it had available, the Eisenhower administration scrambled to pull the threads together by conducting an intelligence "post-mortem." (See [Document 27A](#)). The post-mortem treated the missed opportunities as unfortunate but innocent errors caused by the deficient sharing of information and poor follow-up of instructions. But there have been more conspiratorial explanations of the missed opportunities: for example, the view that pro-Israeli officials in the AEC, CIA, and other agencies stove-piped important reports and information, and the open question that President Eisenhower himself may have chosen to look the other way during 1958-1959.<sup>[5]</sup>

A more delicate and complex dilemma faced by the Eisenhower administration was how to respond both publicly and privately to the challenge to U.S.-Israeli and U.S.-French relations posed by Dimona. Specifically, the administration had to decide how tough it should be and how to balance the Israeli proliferation concern against the rest of the U.S.-Israeli relationship. It is important to keep in mind that the administration was becoming aware of two things: (a) that Israel had made deliberate efforts to keep Dimona secret for as long as possible; and (b) that Washington could hardly take on faith the new Israeli "cover story" about Dimona, including Ben-Gurion's public and private assurances. The administration remained skeptical, if not suspicious.

The possible public disclosure of Dimona also placed Israel, and specifically Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, in a dilemma: How should it react to the disclosure? How much should Israel tell and how truthful should it be? Could Israel tell the U.S. government one thing in private and something else to the world? The question was whether Israel should choose the path of truth or the path of ambiguity and deception. Because the first public statement would have great impact, this was a truly fateful decision. The internal Israeli deliberations about what to say are still unavailable, but it is possible to reconstruct the underlying reasoning based on important public and private statements made by Israeli officials, including Ben-Gurion.

Ben-Gurion chose the path of ambiguity and concealment: he declared that Dimona was purely a civilian scientific project, for training in the use of nuclear power for economic development. It was "exclusively for peaceful purposes," he declared in his Knesset statement on 21 December 1960. In his private assurances to the United States Ben-Gurion provided some new information, but it was entirely consistent with his public version.<sup>[6]</sup> He would not tell the whole truth because the fate of the project was at stake. For Ben-Gurion this ambiguous, if not entirely deceitful, strategy had obvious short-term benefits: lessening U.S. anger and resulting pressure, and thereby avoiding a public showdown with Washington, while also calming the situation at home and in the region generally.<sup>[7]</sup>

It is apparent that the Eisenhower administration had no appetite to call Ben-Gurion's bluff (either in private or in public). Nor was the departing president interested in escalating the Dimona problem into a diplomatic confrontation, which would not have even been possible given, with all that was already on his agenda (the Laos and Berlin crises, for example). Because relations with Israel had been relatively good, Israel had significant domestic support within the

United States, and, perhaps most significantly, the Eisenhower administration was in its last few days in office, the White House let the State Department deal with the issue, keeping it under diplomatic control until the new Kennedy administration took office.

A determination to avoid a crisis encouraged senior officials such as Assistant Secretary of State G. Lewis Jones [Document 19] to try to "calm down" the agencies, including CIA, which he believed had been reacting intemperately, and to ensure that no one tried to cut off aid to Israel. At the same time, "calm", secrecy, and the avoidance of publicity might make it possible for Washington to get answers from the Israeli and put quiet pressure on them to open up Dimona to visits by U.S. scientists and to accept safeguards by the IAEA (in fact, the last thing Ben-Gurion and his associates were likely to accept).

The dilemma the Eisenhower administration faced after the discovery of Dimona in December 1960-January 1961 would endure for the entire decade. From then on, three successive U.S. administrations — under presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon — would have to deal with it as well. President Kennedy chose the toughest path of struggle and confrontation in his effort to check the program; President Johnson realized that the U.S. had limited leverage on the issue and planted the seeds of compromise and looking the other way; finally, in a bargain with Prime Minister Golda Meir, President Nixon accepted the Israel's de facto nuclear status as long as it stayed secret, and in doing so created the present dilemma.

The documents that follow are illuminating but more is to be learned. Many records remain classified in the National Archives, not only in State Department files but also those of the Atomic Energy Commission. The papers of AEC Chairman John McCone at the National Archives include a file on Israel which is the subject of an earlier declassification request along with related State Department files. Moreover, the National Security Archive has pending requests with the Department of Energy, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library. In response to a request to re-review SNIE 100-8-60 (See [Document 8](#)), the CIA has held the line, refusing to release more information. The request is now under appeal.

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## Documents 1A-B:

### Unnoticed Intelligence

**A:** Department of State Instruction A-128 to U.S. Embassy Israel, "Atomic Energy Developments," 7 March 1958, Confidential

**B:** U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv Despatch No. 652 to State Department, "Israeli Exchanges With Other Countries Relating to Atomic Energy," 16 April 1958,

**Source for both:** National Archives (College Park), Record Group 59, Department of State Records (hereinafter RG 59), Central Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 984a.801/4-1658.

Some in the U.S. intelligence community [\[8\]](#) regarded these communications as an early missed opportunity to discover the Dimona project a year or two earlier. In March 1958, in light of growing concern about the possibility of surreptitious nuclear weapons programs, the State Department saw an "urgent" need for information on the Israeli atomic energy program and asked its Tel Aviv embassy to report on "all phases" of Israeli nuclear-related activities, research and development, including any exchanges with foreign governments and organizations. As an example, the instruction cited a recent press report in the *Jerusalem Post* on French-Israeli atomic cooperation. The report included statements by the French minister of foreign affairs, Francois Benard, that France was supplying Israel's uranium needs in exchange for "Israeli discoveries in atomic research for peace."

In response the embassy set up a meeting on 15 April 1958 between embassy Second Secretary Lewis Townsend and Professor David Ernest Bergmann, the chairman of Israel's Atomic Energy Commission. With respect to cooperation with France, Bergmann asserted flatly that Minister Benard "did not know what he was talking about." Bergmann acknowledged that Israel had a nuclear agreement with France but the exchanges under the agreement were informational only. Under the agreement Israel received from France "unpublished reports" and sent students to study at French nuclear centers. He noted that the agreement had no provision under which France was obligated to supply Israel uranium as had been reported; nor had Israel ever received such supply. The substance of Bergmann's commentary was close to what a US AEC representative would hear in Paris more than two years later in a similar inquiry (see [Document 4](#)). The comments were quite accurate as far as that (unpublished) 1954 bi-lateral exchange agreement was concerned (Bergmann mentioned that there was also a tri-lateral agreement on atomic energy research between Israel, France and the UK). Israel did not advertise the existence of those agreements, but did not treat them as classified either. [\[9\]](#)

Not surprisingly, however, Bergmann made no reference to the extremely secret French-Israeli Dimona agreement which had been signed in Paris on 3 October 1957. One must assume that

he must have known something about that deal but it is not clear how much knew given that the IAEC was hardly consulted, let alone involved, in the decisions and actions that led to Dimona.<sup>[10]</sup> Bergmann's most intriguing comment came at the end when he said that the principal decision to build a "power reactor had already been taken." He seems to suggest two stages: first, "plans" which are currently "contemplated" to construct an "experimental nuclear reactor" within two or two-and-a-half years, and then five to seven years later "a large economically feasible [power] reactor could be put into operation."

Was the reference to that "experimental reactor" an oblique reference to Dimona — as indeed Israel initially presented it — or was it a deliberate effort to confuse his American interlocutor? Or perhaps it was a mix of both? It is worth noting that Bergmann was known among Israelis as being loose on secrecy and this was apparently one of the reasons why he was bypassed on the Dimona project.<sup>[11]</sup>

In retrospect, according to the post-mortem investigation (see [Document 27A](#)) on why the United States discovered Dimona two years late, Bergmann's loose comment on the "experimental reactor" was one of those major missing hints. In April 1958 U.S. intelligence wrongly assumed that the reference to the "experimental reactor" was to the US small swimming pool reactor at Soreq whose construction started in January that year at Nachal Soreq (see [Document 3](#)). Moreover, U.S. intelligence took on faith Bergmann's statement about the limited nature of French-Israeli nuclear cooperation, although there had already been some reports about possible French-Israeli secret nuclear cooperation, even the possibility of joint nuclear weapons research. One way or another, a chance to investigate Bergmann's claims and to seek further information about the "experimental reactor" was lost.

The numbers on the right side of these documents indicate that they are from the State Department's central decimal files (whereby documents were filed using numerical combinations denoting subjects and countries). The 900 category signifies communications, transportation, and science; 84 A stands for Israel; and 801 indicates research and development. The filing of the document in the R&D category, instead of the usual 1901 category for nuclear energy matters, would have hindered any U.S. government official who was interested in tracing intelligence on the Israeli nuclear program.

## Documents 2A-C:

### "Certain Highly Classified Transactions with Israel"

**A:** Memorandum of Conversation, Norwegian Foreign Ministry, 5 June 1959, Secret, with 30 December 1960 routing slip [transcript attached]

**B:** Richard Kerry to Philip Farley, 15 June 1959, Secret

**C:** Richard Kerry to Philip Farley, 7 August 1959, enclosing copy of letter to Robert Brandin, and "Memorandum of conversation of August 6, 1959, at the Atomic Energy Institute, Kjeller, Norway," Secret

**Sources:** A: RG59, Records of Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Outer Space, Records Relating to Atomic Energy Matters, 1948-1962 [SAE], box 305, File 12. Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy Safeguards Sept-Dec 1960 Part 1 of 3; B: RG 59, SAE, box 501,Z1.50 Country File Israel d. General 1953-1961 Part 2 of 2 C:RG59, SAE, box 313, Country File Norway d. General 1957-1961 Part 2 of 2

A critical piece of information that was known to the State Department, but for obscure reasons remained unknown to the U.S. intelligence community for many months (see [Document 22](#)), was the 20 tons of heavy water that Norway had quietly sold to Israel upon an agreement signed in Oslo on 25 February 1959. The Norwegians claimed that they wanted to keep the transaction under wraps because disclosure could hurt their diplomatic standing and interfere with business prospects in the Middle East. Evidently, Israel had equally strong reasons of her own to keep the heavy water deal secret as well. For this reason, but also due to an availability issue, Norway used the U.K. as a key third party in the deal: NORATOM (the Norwegian state-sponsored company to promote Norwegian nuclear energy industry) had originally sold heavy water to the United Kingdom for its nuclear weapons program. Then, as part of the three-party arrangement, the Norwegians asked the British to resell their excess heavy water back to NORATOM; even though the product would be shipped directly from the United Kingdom to Israel, it was NORATOM that was selling it. This also enabled NORATOM to avoid the political difficulty of having to apply to the Norwegian government for an export license.<sup>[12]</sup>

According to Olaf Solli, a nuclear energy expert with the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, some British officials wanted to "inform" Washington of the Israeli heavy water deal, but ultimately London did not share the information, according to British press reports in 2005 and 2006 based on new declassifications in British archives.<sup>[13]</sup>

In any event, on 5 June 1959, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry informed AEC official William M. Fullerton, a division chief at the Office of International Affairs, about the agreement to sell heavy water to Israel — subject to "safeguards and inspections" — but the size of the transaction was not reported. The U.S. Embassy in Oslo prepared the memo of conversation and some days later, on 15 June, embassy political officer Richard Kerry forwarded it to Philip J. Farley, the assistant to the secretary of state for disarmament and atomic energy, asking that Fullerton and his boss, Algie Wells, receive copies.

For unknown reasons the memo was lost in the shuffle and was not disseminated above the middle levels of the State Department and the AEC. Top Department officials, not to mention those at the CIA or from State Department intelligence, did not see that June 1959 memo until December 1960, although months before the CIA had learned there had been a deal.[\[14\]](#) Accordingly, the questions about the sale that could have been asked of the Israelis, the Norwegians, and the British were not.

In a follow-up conversation, Richard Kerry learned more, indirectly, about the political sensitivity of Norwegian secret deals with Israel from Gunnar Randers, the director of the Atomic Energy Institute, and the key figure in Norwegian nuclear policy after World War II. Referring to NORATOM's negotiations with the Egyptians over "isotope work," Randers saw a "delicate" situation concerning transactions with Israel, but as long as they did not reach the public the Norwegians would not face any "difficulties" from Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Randers was a close friend of the IAEC chair, David Bergmann, and this story supported Israel's need for secrecy but it also suited Randers who had not kept the upper levels of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry in the picture (see [Document 20](#)).

## Document 3:

### "French Atomic Energy Project in Israel"

**U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv Despatch 75 to State Department, "French Atomic Energy Project in Israel," 2 August 1960, Confidential**

**Source: National Archives (College Park), Record Group 59, Department of State records (RG 59), Central Decimal Files 1960-1963, 884A.1901/8-260**

American Machine and Foundry (AMF) Atomic was the company which installed for Israel the 1 MW swimming pool type light water nuclear reactor at Nachal Soreq (known today as the Soreq Nuclear Research Center) that Israel received as a gift from the U.S. under the 1955 "Atoms for Peace" bilateral agreement. In late July 1960, U.S. Embassy officials learned from a conversation with D. Anderson, an AMF employee, that French personnel were involved in building "a 60 megawatt atomic power reactor" in the Beersheba area. Anderson stated that this was his "impression, gained on conversations he had with an Israeli, Daniel Kimhi, the director of the Naptha Petroleum Company. According to Kimhi, the French nationals were working on a project described to him as 'gas cooled power reactor capable of producing approximately 60 megawatts of electrical power.'" Anderson's understanding was that the project had been under way for "about two years" with the completion date two years off.

As of this writing, this document is the first and earliest available declassified US document that makes explicit reference to the Dimona project. We should note that at the National Archives (College Park), over one hundred additional documents from 1960-1961 remain classified in the decimal files. A declassification request for them is pending.

The embassy reported this conversation to Washington and asked that the U.S. embassy in Paris look into the French government's role, if any, in the alleged development. It took a few weeks before this information went to nuclear energy intelligence experts in Washington (at the AEC and CIA) who came to realize that they had missed other pieces of intelligence (See [Document 27A](#)) and began looking more closely at what was going on at the Dimona site.

## Documents 4A-B:

### "The French CEA Was Not Collaborating with the Israelis"

**A**: State Department Instruction CA-3636 to U.S. Embassy Paris, "Reported Atomic Reactor Power Project at Beersheba," 19 October 1960, confidential

**B**: U.S. Embassy Paris Airgram G-766 to State Department, 22 November 1960, Confidential

**Sources:** A: Record Group 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Classified Records of the U.S. Mission to the International Atomic Energy Agency, 1955-1963, box 1, Atomic Energy Developments Israel 1959-61; B: Freedom of Information release

When the U.S intelligence community got wind of the Tel Aviv embassy report on the French-Israeli reactor project (see [Document 2](#)), it took time to digest it; U.S. officials realized that more information was needed because apparently they had no independent sources to corroborate the report. (It is still a puzzle whether, and to what extent, U-2 overhead photographs were especially telling or whether they were being distributed within the intelligence community.) [15] According to the post-mortem (see [Document 27A](#), PDF page 23), the CIA formulated a list of technical questions about French-Israeli collaboration, including the organizations involved in the project, reactor specifications, and plans for spent fuel, e.g. whether the Israelis were building a chemical separation plant. The State Department sent the CIA questions as an "Instruction" to the U.S. embassy in Israel, with the embassy in Paris and the U.S. mission to the IAEA also receiving copies. The request for information did not get high priority; it had a "Routine collection priority."

If the U.S. embassy in Israel ever sent back a formal response, it is still classified. But U.S. military attaches at the Embassy in Tel Aviv did begin collecting information and sent photographs back to Washington. Another attempt to ferret out information is known: John Rouleau, the AEC's representative in Paris, tried, but he met with complete denial from an unnamed member of the French Atomic Energy Commission. The latter, according to Rouleau's account, "stated flatly that the French CEA was not collaborating with the Israelis in the construction of a nuclear power reactor." Furthermore, the official denied that any French company could be working with the Israelis on a power reactor because "prior permission from the CEA would be required and such permission has neither been requested nor granted."

While the French official denied any bilateral cooperation with Israel on a power reactor, he acknowledged the existence of an earlier 1954 agreement between the two national atomic energy commissions under which the bodies collaborated in two specific areas: (1) heavy water production and (2) extracting uranium from phosphates. In retrospect, it is impossible to say whether the CEA interlocutor truly knew nothing about the Dimona project—the Israeli-French

deal was highly compartmentalized and secret within the CEA-or whether he made a deliberate effort to mislead the United States. Strictly speaking, however, his statement was not a lie because the Dimona reactor was not a power reactor.

## Document 5:

### **"The Know-How on Building Crude Atomic Bombs"**

**Memorandum of conversation, "Safeguards for Reactors, "25 November 1960, Secret**

**Source: National Archives (College Park), Record Group 59, Department of State Records (hereinafter RG 59), Records of Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Outer Space, Records Relating to Atomic Energy Matters, 1948-1962, box 305, 12H P.U.S File: 18. Safeguards September-December 1960 [Part 2 of 3]**

Despite the lack of cooperation from the French government, Washington was piecing together information about the site in the Negev Desert from a variety of intelligence sources. By 25 November, Secretary of State Herter was confident enough in the information accumulated so far to share its essence with British Ambassador Harold Caccia. While intelligence experts in London and Washington had already been consulting each other (see chronology with [Document 27A](#)), Herter took it to a higher level by telling Caccia that Washington had unconfirmed reports that a "plutonium-producing reactor may be being built in Israel with French aid." Furthermore, France may be giving the Israelis the "know how" to build "crude atomic bombs." What made the existence of the Israeli reactor project of special concern was that for months Washington and its allies had been trying to build a consensus at the IAEA in favor of effective safeguards on nuclear power plants; this "new factor emphasized the importance of providing adequate atomic energy safeguards."



## Documents 6A-C:

### Professor Gomberg's Discoveries

**A**: Paris Embassy Telegram 2162 to State Department, 26 November 1960, Secret

**B**: Memorandum of conversation, [Title excised], 1 December 1960, Secret, excised copy

**C**: Central Intelligence Agency, Information Report, "Nuclear Engineering/Large Nuclear and Electric Power Plant Near Beersheba/French Nuclear Assistance to Israel/Israeli Attitude Toward the Announcement of its Large Scale Nuclear Effort/Opportunity for U.S. Participation in Nuclear Powered Water Conversion," 9 February 1961, Confidential

**Sources:** A: RG 59, Records of Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Outer Space, Records Relating to Atomic Energy Matters, 1948-1962, box 305, 12H P.U.S File: 18. Safeguards September-December 1960 [Part 2 of 3], B: Freedom of Information release; C: RG59, Records of Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Outer Space, 1948-1961, box 501, Z1.50 Country File Israel f. Reactor 1960

Flying back to Ann Arbor on his way back from Israel, Professor Henry Gomberg, on the faculty of the University of Michigan's nuclear engineering department, briefly stopped in Paris on 25 November and met with Roleau. As a guest of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission and a consultant on matters of nuclear education, Gomberg had picked up some "urgent and secret" pieces of information — and suspicions — about the Israeli nuclear program that he wanted to share with U.S. government officials. He tantalized Roleau by holding back what he had learned, but the little he said implied that Israel, with French aid, was engaged in some sort of a large scale secret nuclear power project. Gomberg also noted that he learned from an unnamed personal friend of Ben-Gurion [he probably meant Dr. Bergmann] that within a few weeks Israel would announce a five year [atomic energy] plan and would disclose the construction at the Beersheba site.

Several days later, on 1 December, Gomberg came to Washington for a full debriefing of AEC and State Department representatives. His name is redacted from this release of the memorandum of that conversation (declassified in the early 1990s) but it is evident that Gomberg was the subject of the debriefing. The same is true of the subsequent CIA report dated 9 February which also masked Gomberg's identity. This document, apparently based on an interview at the time of Gomberg's visit, contains detailed information, including his observations and tentative conclusions.

Based on various meetings in Israel, Gomberg became convinced that the large site the Israelis had described as an "agricultural experiment station" was actually a "large classified project." It

was evident to him that all his Israeli interlocutors were "thoroughly briefed to restrict their discussion within security bounds," and yet his discussions at the Technion led him to believe that the Israelis were creating a much larger and more thorough nuclear training program than was needed by their own declared programs. He got a similar impression in his discussions at the Weizmann Institute (Plant [Machon] #4) where one person distressed his guide by mentioning that Plant [Machon] #4 was expected "to be working with gram quantities of Plutonium and curie quantities of polonium." The plutonium issue was probably the most sensitive matter for the Israelis because of its weapons implications.

Gomberg concluded that the classified project was probably "a large nuclear and electrical power plant," whose construction had been underway for some three years, located east of Beersheba. In another part of his report he described the reactor as "far beyond any kind of a training reactor and it will be capable of producing weapons grade plutonium." Gomberg noted that he believed the Israelis had the technical capability to construct and operate a nuclear plant up to the level of 200 MW thermal. Then he estimated that the power level of the Beersheba project would be approximately 250 MW thermal. Later Gomberg noted that US photographs that were shown to him indicated a very close resemblance to the French G-1 reactor in Marcoule.

In his last meeting with Dr. Bergmann, Gomberg pressed him for information about "activities which were not freely discussed"; the latter acknowledged that the original intention was to announce the Beersheba facility later in 1961, but that because of the many rumors Ben-Gurion would make an announcement about a power reactor project in about three weeks time.

## Document 7:

### **The "Cover Story Would Not be Successful for Long"**

**Memorandum from Deputy Operations Coordinator Charles E. Rogers, Office of Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, to Mr. Jones and Mr. Farley, 7 December 1960, Secret**

**Source: RG 59, Records of Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Outer Space, Records Relating to Atomic Energy Matters, 1948-1962, box 501, CF21.50 Israel F. Reactor1960**

While the U.S. intelligence community was finalizing its estimate of the secret Israeli reactor, senior officials had already discussed the problem and what to do about it at a luncheon meeting of the Operations Coordinating Board, which served as the coordinating and implementing unit for President Eisenhower's National Security Council system. After Gordon Gray, the president's national security assistant, opened the discussion, Deputy Under Secretary of State Livingston Merchant emphasized the subject's "political sensitivity" and cautioned against any comments that cast doubt upon an anticipated Israeli announcement, even though it was generally agreed that the Israeli "cover story would not be successful for long." This was probably a reference to the description of the plant as a "power reactor." In the entire matter, "the Department of State would be the sole spokesman." A skeptical reader, possibly Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs G. Lewis Jones, wrote "Ha!" next to the "sole spokesman" comment because Jones believed that too many other agencies "wanted to get into the act" (see Jones letter to Reid with [Document 19](#) below).

## Document 8:

### **"Plutonium Production for Weapons Is At least One Major Purpose**

**Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 100-8-60, "Implications of the Acquisition by Israel of a Nuclear Weapons Capability," 8 December 1960, with Memoranda to Holders Attached, 22 and 29 December 1960, attached, Secret, Excised copy**

**Source: MDR appeal to ISCAP, declassified in 2009, presently undergoing further review**

On the basis of intelligence collected during the summer and fall of 1960 (of which much remains classified), possibly including the most recent information from Henry Gomberg, on 8 December 1958 Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles signed off on a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) entitled "Implications of the Acquisition by Israel of a Nuclear Weapons Capability." The U.S. Intelligence Board, whose member agencies participated in the drafting process, concurred in the estimate that same day. The SNIE began with a firm factual determination that "Israel is engaged in construction of a nuclear reactor complex in the Negev near Beersheba." Acknowledging that there could be various ways to interpret the function of the Dimona complex, the authors believed that "on the basis of all available evidence" that "plutonium production for weapons is at least one major purpose of this effort." The "surrounding" secrecy and Dimona's remote location was strong evidence of the military purposes. The SNIE estimated "that Israel will produce some weapons grade plutonium in 1963-64 and possibly as early as 1962."

France's extensive aid was noted but the exact nature of the assistance, including details on the reactor, and whether, and to what extent, the complex also included plutonium extraction (reprocessing), has been excised from this version of the SNIE. Also excised is the information mentioned in several subsequent updates ("Memorandum to Holders" on 22 and 29 December 1960). The Norwegian heavy water sale to Israel was noted — the CIA had discovered the purchase earlier in the year — but whether the State Department had rediscovered its documentation on the transaction by this point is not clear.

The SNIE also included a detailed discussion of the broader implications of the Dimona reactor: what it said about French and Israeli motivations, the possible reactions by the Arab world and the Soviet bloc, as well as the overall "repercussions" among western allies.

The SNIE became controversial as soon as it was published because senior intelligence officials were learning that the intelligence agencies and other U.S. government organizations had collected telling evidence several years earlier indicating that Israel had a secret nuclear reactor

program under way. This recognition led to the production of an intelligence post-mortem to look at what had been missed and why (See [Document 27A](#))

## Document 9:

# Memorandum of Discussion at the 470<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, December 8, 1960, Top Secret, excised copy

**Source: U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960 Volume XIII, Arab-Israeli Dispute; United Arab Republic; North Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992)**

The day that the SNIE was issued, the National Security Council met, with Eisenhower presiding, and received a briefing on the estimate by Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles who passed around photos of Dimona taken by the U.S. Army attaché. Dulles began by noting that Israel was constructing, with French assistance, a nuclear complex in the Negev. The complex contained a reactor capable of "producing weapons-grade plutonium." His initial statement included three more lines which are still classified. As to the French assistance, it included equipment, personnel and training, as well as "fuel elements." Neither CIA nor the AEC believed, contrary to Israel's anticipated statement that the project was "solely for peaceful purposes." Secretary of State Herter noted that the Arab reaction to the discovery would be "severe." (At that point four-and-a-half lines of Herter's comment are classified.) He also claimed that the cost of the reactor might be 40 to 80 million dollars.

During the discussion of the nuclear proliferation implications of an Israeli weapons program, the conversation briefly turned to how the plant was financed. Under Secretary of the Treasury Fred Scribner suggested that an important funding source may have been "Jewish charitable organizations in the U.S." which received tax-deductible contributions. This had caused past problems because some charitable funds had been "diverted to government operations in Israel."

The still-classified portions of this meeting record are the subject of a mandatory declassification review request filed in 2014.

## Document 10:

### **"Considerable Weapons Potential"**

**Telephone Call Logs of Secretary of State Christian Herter, 9 December 1960,**

**Unclassified Source: Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Christian Herter Papers**

On [9 December](#), Secretary of State Herter summoned Israeli ambassador Avraham Harman to the State Department and showed him photos of the Dimona reactor, asking for an explanation that would remove "bases for concern." Harman said he knew nothing of the project but would inform his government. Later that afternoon, Herter called Claude Lebel, the chargé d'affaires at the French embassy, and asked about French involvement in the project. Herter prefaced his question by referring to a report he had received from his embassy in Tel Aviv that Prime Minister Ben-Gurion was about to announce that a new experimental reactor had been built in the Negev with French aid. Herter noted that, according to information the United States had ascertained, Israel had been involved since 1958 in constructing a reactor "which is at least ten times as large as claimed," and that the design appeared to be not for power but for plutonium production, hence, it would provide Israel "considerable weapons potential." Furthermore, Herter noted that the cost of the reactor was between 40 to 80 million dollars. Lebel had no information to offer and promised to pass the query on to Paris.

## **Document 11:**

### **"He Assumed the Money Came From" the United States**

**Paris Embassy Telegram CAHTO4, 16 December 1960, Top Secret**

**Source: RG 59. Records of the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs, Records Relating to Israel, 1964-1966, box 8, Israel Atomic Energy Program**

A week later, Herter was in Paris for a NATO meeting where he met with his French counterpart, Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville. The latter directly acknowledged the secret French-Israeli deal to build a "replica of [the] Marcoule plant." Under the agreement, Couve de Murville added, France would supply the raw materials and receive any plutonium produced by the plant. The Israelis would not make any public statement without first consulting the French government. In reply to Herter's question about how the plant was financed, Couve stated that he "assumed the money came from US." Herter understood that comment to mean that the project was financed by the "diversion of US government or private [American] aid."



## Document 12:

### **Meet the Press**

**Memorandum of Conversation, " Suggested Guidance for Chairman McCone's Use in 'Meet the Press' Interview December 18 If Asked About Reported Israeli Atomic Weapons Developments," 17 December 1960, Secret**

**Source: Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, International Series, box 8, Israel (3):**

With AEC Chairman John McCone slated to appear on "Meet the Press," AEC and State Department officials met to develop an integrated approach to ensure that what he said comported with the government's over-all position. The officials developed an approach that he could follow "with dignity" and not "be drawn into implications" that the U.S. was associated with an alleged Israeli nuclear weapons program. With respect to earlier press reports from London about an Israeli atomic bomb project, McCone would not comment. He could say that the U.S. opposed the proliferation of nuclear weapons capabilities, and that it was "firmly established policy" that "our law does not permit us to assist other countries to develop" such capabilities. If questioned, McCone could acknowledge U.S. support for Israeli research under the "Atoms for Peace" program.

In his comments on "Meet the Press," McCone took his own approach; his main disclosure was an acknowledgement that the Israelis had not "revealed" the reactor to the U.S. He further stated that Washington was trying to get more information, that the existence of the reactor did not necessarily mean a bomb project, although the reactor could produce plutonium, and that Israeli compliance with IAEA safeguards would provide a good test case for inspection and "allay fear of weapons intent."[\[16\]](#)

## Documents 13A-B:

### "Israel Should Forth with Open the Plants"

**A:** White House Office of the Staff Secretary, "Memorandum of Conference with the President December 19, 1960", 12 January 1961, Secret, Excised Copy

**B:** Department of State, "U.S. Notes Reports of Israel's Atomic Energy Activities," 19 December 1961

**Sources:** A: Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, International Series, box 8, Israel (3); B: *Department of State Bulletin*, 9 January 1961, No. 1124, page 45.

With the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* publishing stories about Dimona, partly based on leaks by John McCone,<sup>[17]</sup> President Eisenhower convened his top aides to discuss the Israeli reactor, how to respond to the publicity, and what kind of a public stance it was appropriate to take. This record of a meeting between Eisenhower and his closest advisers was probably not the president's first discussion of the discovery of Dimona and its implications, but it was probably the highest level formal gathering and the most wide-ranging discussion. The conference record reveals some remarkable points:

- **Purpose of the Dimona Complex and Reliability of US knowledge** : Secretary of Defense Thomas S. Gates pointed out that "our information is that the plant is not for peaceful uses." The President's science advisor, Dr. George Kistiakowsky, responded that "there is some doubt about this" because it is unclear whether a chemical separation is on site (or being constructed). AEC Chairman McCone responded that his people believed that "there is a chemical separation plant there." He added that it would make no sense that the Israelis would do just "part of the job." This issue, whether Dimona had or did not have a secret separation plant, would haunt the US intelligence community for at least a decade. In retrospect, Gates and McCone were right from the start.
- **Cost and US financial involvement:** McCone observed that the Dimona plant "had probably been financed from US support to Israel" and Herter supported the claim, adding that "it is clear that they [the Israelis] have constructed this plant through diversions from private and public [US] aid to Israel." Eisenhower himself noted that "we had evidence" that the project cost was in a range between \$100 and \$200 million. (Incidentally, these figures are more than double the figure Herter cited at the National Security Council meeting a week earlier.) The president added, "we do not know where they have obtained the funds," but the US government has a strong interest in knowing

"because of the aid we are giving them." Eisenhower's remark is one of the rare mentions of a financial estimate for the Dimona project.

- **Inspection:** When McCone urged that the U.S. insist the Dimona plant be under IAEA safeguards, Gates suggested that the Israelis be asked to open the plant for inspection because Israel had signed the agreement that established the IAEA. Eisenhower agreed: the US statement should express confidence that because Israel was an IAEA member and had claimed that the reactor was for peaceful uses, it should allow inspections. When national security assistant Gordon Gray asked whether the US would insist on visiting the site, Eisenhower replied that it would not be necessary if the US was successful in forcing IAEA inspections.
- **Intentions and Concealment:** CIA Director Allen Dulles noted that Israel was trying to create confusion by associating the Dimona plant, "which is a large production installation," with the very small Soreq reactor built with U.S. aid.

The meeting ended with the decision that Dimona should be handled by the Department of State, not the White House. Since the issue had emerged in the very last weeks of the Eisenhower presidency it was apparent the White House could not set a lasting policy but if any public statement was to be made it was to be coordinated with Herter. Nevertheless, for Eisenhower, the key objective was for the government of Israeli to accept IAEA inspections on the plant so that they could demonstrate its peaceful purposes.

During the meeting Herter had said that a U.S. statement should "remove [us] from suspicion" because Washington was not complicit in Dimona. Thus, the public statement made later that day noted the press reports about the reactor and "welcomed" Israel's assurance that the government had "no intention of producing nuclear weapons." The U.S. had provided no assistance because that would be contrary to U.S. nonproliferation policy and the Atomic Energy Act. The U.S. was concerned about the Israeli project and had asked Ambassador Harman for information. "A response has not been received."

## Document 14:

### **State Department telegram 3311 to U.S. Embassy London, 20 December 1960, Secret**

**Source: Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, International Series, box 8, Israel (3)**

On [20 December](#) Herter met with Ambassador Harman for the second time to discuss Dimona. At this meeting Harman answered Herter's earlier questions by providing a narrative that became Israel's basic cover story: Yes, Israel was building an additional reactor in the Negev with 24 megawatt capacity, meaning, but it had "no industrial importance." The purpose of the Dimona reactor was "the development of scientific knowledge for eventual industrial, agricultural, medical and other scientific purposes, as an interim step toward enabling Israel to build its own power reactors." The project "would take some 3 to 4 years to complete and it would have no relationship to a weapons capacity." Several times during the meeting Herter raised questions about safeguards and the plutonium that would be produced in the reactor; Harman could not answer them, but asserted that upon completion the facility would be open to students from "friendly counties" and that it was for peaceful purposes.

## Document 15:

### "We have been misbehaving a little"

**U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv telegram 574 to State Department, 23 December 1960, Secret**

**Source: National Archives, Record Group 469, U.S. Operations Mission to Israel, Executive Office Classified Central Files 1952-1961, box 10, Atomic Matters 1960**

Far more candid than Harman was Addy Cohen, the Finance Ministry's director of economic assistance; a graduate of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, he served as a liaison to the U.S. embassy. Classified in the State Department's "Roger Channel" for sensitive intelligence, this surprising telegram memorialized several conversations on 21 and 22 December between Cohen and U.S. diplomats and foreign aid officials: Deputy Chief of Mission Murat Williams, Director of the U.S. Operations Mission [USOM][\[18\]](#)C. Reed Liggitt, and Agricultural Attaché Grover Chappell. In these discussions Cohen gave the impression that the reactor would "eventually be used for weapons purposes," which could offer a "'deterrent' to Arab action against Israel." He volunteered that he had concealed the nature of the "top secret" project during several helicopter fly-bys with U.S. officials; during one of them, in February 1960, he had characterized the reactor construction site as a "textile plant" because as he put it "that was our story at the time." Admitting that the government of Israel had "been misbehaving a little," Cohen thought that displeasure over the reactor might be the reason why Washington had delayed the signing of the PL 480 agreement (on food aid to Israel). Finally, commenting on a recent *Jerusalem Post* article claiming that 250 million Israeli pounds had been spent on the project, Cohen said that Israel had not "spent that much yet."

Also according to this message, an unidentified official close to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion had told the Canadian ambassador that the secrecy was unjustifiable and that it was "a stupid mistake on the part of Israel." As to why the subject had come up at this time, December 1960, the same source speculated that the CIA had been "caught off guard" in 1956 when Israel invaded the Sinai desert and this time "did not want to be caught napping."

## Document 16:

### **"Why in [the United] States is Everything Being Told [to] Everybody?"**

**U.S. Embassy Israel Telegram 577 to State Department, 24 December 1960, Secret**

**Source: Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, International Series, box 8, Israel (3)**

On 22 December Prime Minister Ben-Gurion gave a statement in the Knesset claiming the reactor was for peaceful purposes, a statement which the State Department welcomed.<sup>[19]</sup> Two days later, Ambassador Ogden Reid finally had a long discussion about Dimona with Ben-Gurion. The latter was plainly irritated about the questions and the press reports: "Why in [the] States is everything being told everybody?" He justified the secrecy because of the Arab boycott; the participating companies did not want their role disclosed so Israel had to protect their interests. Yet his account of the Dimona project consisted of the same story that he had told the Knesset (and the same story that he would use for his meeting with President Kennedy in late May 1961): the project was for the economic development of Israel and of the Negev in particular; electric power was a badly needed resource.<sup>[20]</sup> Yet when Reid asked if the reactor would be producing power, Ben-Gurion said no; it was for research and training.

On safeguards for plutonium, Ben-Gurion said that Israel was "three or four years" away from facing that problem. But, he declared: "When we get to that point we won't be behind any power in the world in respect to safeguards." A few weeks later, Ben-Gurion would take a different position (See [Document 23](#)).

Referring to Egyptian President Nasser's declaration that an Israeli nuclear weapons program would mean war, Reid asked what Israel could do to alleviate those concerns; Ben-Gurion replied that the State Department's statement welcoming the Israeli declarations, had been helpful.

## Document 17:

### **The Need for a Visit by "Internationally Known Scientists"**

**U.S. Embassy Israel Telegram 590 to State Department, 28 December 1960, Secret, excised copy**

**Source: Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, International Series, box 8, Israel (3)**

Mulling over Ben-Gurion's evasions, Ambassador Reid suggested to the Department some ideas for bringing up the question of safeguards and inspection with Foreign Minister Golda Meir. One was to suggest a visit of "IAEA scientific designee or internationally known scientists"; another, a more low key approach, was to use an AEC inspection visit to the smaller American reactor in Nachal Rubin [Soreq] to ask Israel to visit the new [Dimona] reactor. While doubting whether Ben-Gurion would favor any such proposals, Reid thought State should press Israel to request IAEA safeguards as a step toward "tranquility and peace" in the region. Getting Ben-Gurion to go along would probably require concerted action by the U.S., France, and the United Kingdom. The note included also the embassy's own estimate of the cost of the Dimona project, which by then was the lowest of all the U.S. estimates: 17.8 million dollars in foreign exchange and some 29.2 million in local currency (Israeli pounds) costs. In comments, Reid noted that Israel would need to be assured that the names of foreign firms involved in the project would be protected from inspectors. Moreover, until the Department agreed, Reid suggested deferring a proposal by Chief of Naval Operations Arleigh Burke for a visit to Dimona by a Navy nuclear expert, Commander Ragnwald Muller, who was with the Office of Naval Intelligence in Frankfurt, West Germany.

## **Document 18:**

### **Israel had "By No Means Come Clean with Us"**

**Memorandum from Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Livingston Merchant to**

**Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs G. Lewis Jones, 28 December 1960, Secret**

**Source: RG 59, Records of Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Outer Space, Records Relating to Atomic Energy Matters, 1948-1962, box 501, CF21.50 Israel F. Reactor 1960**

Under Secretary of State Merchant briefed Assistant Secretary Lewis Jones about an Operations Coordinating Board [OCB] discussion of the Israel nuclear problem where Allen Dulles had grumbled that Israel had "by no means come clean with us." The participants were also annoyed that the Development Loan Fund (DLF) had authorized a loan to Israel despite the OCB's agreement that such action should be delayed. Eisenhower's national security assistant, Gordon Gray, emphasized that the president wanted further efforts to secure Israel's agreement to IAEA inspections. Such efforts, however, were not to reach the press and any initiative should be "conducted quietly through diplomatic channels."



## Document 19:

### "It Was Stupid of Them"

**Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs G. Lewis Jones to Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Livingston Merchant, "Israel's Atomic Energy Activities," 30 December 1960, Secret, with attachments [Transcript of letter from Jones to Reid, 28 December 1960 attached]**

**Source: RG 59. Records of the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs, Records Relating to Israel, 1964-1966, box 8, Israel Atomic Energy Program**

Responding to Merchant's request for an update on recent developments, Lewis Jones sent him documents relating to six different actions that various offices within the State Department were taking relating to the Israeli reactor, including his recent letter to Ambassador Reid and a message to the Embassy in Norway. In the letter, Jones let his hair down, writing about the "intemperate reaction" in Washington, which his bureau was trying to "calm down," the "unnecessary Israeli caper;" the widespread impression that "the Israelis have inexcusably duped us;" the need for Israel to dispel doubts by letting U.S. scientists visit the site; and the possibility that the situation will "worsen" as suspicion grows. A [briefing](#) that Jones gave to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in early January conveyed a similar sense of being duped and the anger that influential members of the Senate felt about Israel's secretiveness and evasive responses.

In the telegram to Oslo, the State Department asked the U.S. Embassy to seek further information on the Norwegian sale of heavy water to Israel and to ask that the government "exercise fully its safeguard rights" under the agreement. With the Norwegian heavy water sale being one of the pieces of the intelligence puzzle that Washington had missed, the administration was now investigating why, and what it had missed earlier.

Jones also enclosed a draft message to Ambassador Reid that had been prepared (not attached to this memo, but see [Document 21](#)) asking for replies to "unanswered questions" and to let Merchant know that other bureaus were preparing messages to get more information from the French and to advance the possibility of IAEA safeguards. Jones agreed with Merchant that what was most important was avoiding further publicity and the necessity for quiet diplomacy.

## Document 20:

### **"The Possibility of [It] Embarrassing the Government"**

**Letter from Richard Kerry, U.S. Embassy Oslo, to William Burdette, Office of British Commonwealth and Northern European Affairs, 30 December 1960, with Israeli-Norwegian agreement attached, with routine slip dated 6 January 1961**

**Source: RG 59, Records of Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Outer Space, 1948-1961, box 512, Z1.69 Country File Norway a. Norway-Israel Agreement 1961**

In response to the State Department request, embassy officers in Oslo obtained more information on the Israel-Norway heavy water deal and the terms of the sale agreement, which included a "peaceful uses" stipulation. On 30 December, political officer Richard Kerry obtained a copy of the agreement which he believed could be embarrassing to the Norwegian government in light of its efforts to play the role of "honest broker" in international conflicts, including the Middle East. The agreement included an Israeli commitment that the use of the heavy water was for peaceful purposes, including an inspection clause.

According to Kerry's letter, a major problem was that the heavy water sale had been initially treated as a commercial sale by the Norwegian firm NORATOM without appropriate vetting by political experts at the Foreign Ministry (like an earlier controversial sale of weapons to the Batista dictatorship in Cuba). Kerry asked the State Department to keep the transaction a secret and so it stayed until the late 1970s when the Stockholm Institute of Peace Research disclosed it. Kerry did not mention the British role in the affair and may, in fact, have forgotten it.[\[21\]](#)

## Document 21:

### "Clearly Apparent Lack of Candor"

**State Department telegram 502 to U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv, 31December 1960, Secret**

**Source: Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, International Series, box 8, Israel (3)**

This telegram, originally published in the [FRUS](#) in an excised version, showed how unhappy the State Department was with Ben-Gurion's explanation of the Dimona reactor: his answers "appear evasive." The State Department saw the "clearly apparent lack of candor [as] difficult to reconcile with [the] confidence which had traditionally characterized U.S.-Israel relations." To restore confidence, Israel needed to answer questions about its plans to dispose of plutonium, the application of safeguards to plutonium produced, visits by IAEA or other scientists to the reactor site, and whether there were plans to build a third reactor. Moreover, "can Israel state unequivocally that it has no plans for producing nuclear weapons?"

## Document 22:

### "Until All Reactors Are Treated as Equals"

Embassy Tel Aviv telegram 625, 4 January 1961, as summarized in a "[Chronology of Israel Assurances of Peaceful Use of Atomic Energy and Related Events](#)," enclosed with a "Memorandum from Benjamin Read, Executive Secretary, Department of State, for McGeorge Bundy, The White House, "Israel's Assurances Concerning Use of Atomic Energy," 18 March 1964, Secret, published as document number 9 in [National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 432](#)

In early January, Ambassador Reid had a meeting with Ben-Gurion, who provided answers to the State Department's questions. The reporting telegram remains classified at the National Archives but a summary is available. The essence of the matter, according to Ben-Gurion, was that: 1) Israel "has no plans for producing nuclear weapons," 2) Israel had no plutonium but "as far as we know" returning the plutonium produced by the reactor was a "condition" imposed by the country (France) that sold the uranium, 3) it would not accept IAEA inspection, especially if Russians were involved, or international safeguards "until all reactors are treated as equals," 3) visits by representatives of "friendly powers" were possible, and 4) Israel had absolutely no plans for a third reactor. How State Department officials interpreted these statements remains unknown, but some may have seen the statement about nuclear weapons as equivocal and evasive.[\[22\]](#)

## **Document 23:**

### **"Damaging Air of Secrecy or Suspicious"**

**State Department telegram 2821 to U.S. Embassy Paris, 6 January 1961, Secret**

**Source: Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, International Series, box 8, Israel (3)**

Believing that neither France nor Israel had been forthright and that the lack of candor had damaging implications for Middle East stability, Herter asked U.S. Ambassador Amory Houghton to meet with Couve de Murville and discuss his earlier statement about the French- Israeli nuclear project. If the Dimona project is a "large scale production reactor," the French need to be "unequivocally clear that [their] assistance is directed solely to peaceful uses." The reply to this telegram is not yet available, but the substance can be found in [Document 26](#).

## **Documents 24A-B:**

### **Molotov:**

#### **"I Stayed Awake All Night and Worried"**

**A: U.S. Mission to International Atomic Energy Agency (Vienna) telegram 1087 to State Department, 11 January 1961, Secret**

**B: State Department telegram 1194 to U.S. Mission to International Atomic Energy Agency (Vienna), 13 January 1961, Secret**

**Source for both: RG59, Central Decimal Files 1960-1963, 398.1901-IAEA/1-1161**

The U.S. Mission to the IAEA which had been in the forefront of U.S. efforts to develop an effective safeguards policy, asked for policy guidance if the Dimona issue came up for debate at the upcoming meeting of the Board of Governors. Ben-Gurion's declaration to the Knesset that the reactor was for peaceful purposes was "hardly adequate" because the Mission had been at loggerheads with the Soviets and the Indians who had argued that assurances were the only safeguards that were needed. Recognizing that the Israeli situation would be used to support arguments for strong safeguards, Vayecheslav Molotov, one of the senior Soviet representatives to the Agency (and once Stalin's right hand man) sarcastically commented that he had "stayed awake all night and worried" when he read about the Israel reactor program.

Following the approach recommended by Lewis Jones and others, the State Department advised the IAEA Mission of the importance of promoting a "period of calm." In discussions in Vienna, the Mission should "avoid impugning" Israeli statements about peaceful purposes but also avoid a "white wash" of the Israeli position. It was in the U.S. "interest" to send scientists to visit the reactor site and to get "first-hand information" but the Department noted that the Israelis have "reacted strongly" against any proposal for inspection and are not likely to change in the "immediate future."

## Document 25:

### "Some Israel[i] Evasions"

**Murat W. Williams to William L. Hamilton, "A Catalog of Replies Regarding the Reactor," 16 January 1961, Secret, with transcript attached**

**Source: RG 59, Records of Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Outer Space, 1948-1961, box 501, Z1.50 Country File Israel f. Reactor 1961, Part 1 of 2**

On his way to an ambassadorship in El Salvador, Murat W. Williams, who had just left his post as deputy chief of mission at the Embassy in Tel Aviv, provided background on the various Israeli cover stories for the Dimona project. Apparently the most truthful response came from Minister of Development director general Eliezer Preminger who told Jack [John James] Haggerty, then the USOM director, that the site was a "military installation" and that he should ask the military attaché to look into it. Williams recounted the dissembling responses from Addy Cohen and other Israeli Foreign Liaison Officers [FLO] who, as noted elsewhere in this posting, had told Ambassador Reid and others that the construction site was for a textile factory, metallurgical research, meteorological installation, and part of a research program at a "new university."

## Document 26:

### **"Israel Has No Plans for the Production of Atomic Weapons"**

**Letter, William B. McComber, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Affairs, to James T. Ramey, Executive Director, Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, 19 January 1961, Secret**

**Source: FOIA release**

As the Eisenhower administration was winding down, the State Department submitted this comprehensive report (also published in the [FRUS](#)) to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy as a summary of all the information that the State Department had received officially from the Israeli and French governments in response to questions about the Dimona reactor. One must assume this body of information was used to brief the incoming Kennedy administration on what the Israelis and French had said on the record. Some of the answers may have been provided in response to the State Department telegram sent on 31 December ([Document 21](#) above), for example, the statement that all plutonium to be produced in Dimona would be returned to France, and the ambiguous assurance that "Israel has no plans for the production of atomic weapons." As for the French, they asserted that plutonium produced in the reactor would be returned to France, that France and Israel had agreed that the reactor was for "exclusively peaceful use," and that French inspectors would be visiting the reactor. Oddly, what is missing is a claim, positive or negative, whether the complex actually included a chemical separation plant that could produce plutonium. Also, the financial estimate was a little different from that cited before ([Document 13A](#)).



## Documents 27A-B:

### The Post-Mortem

**A:** U.S. Joint Atomic Energy Intelligence Committee, "Post-Mortem on SNIE 100-8-60: Implications of the Acquisition by Israel of a Nuclear Weapons Capability," 31 January 1961, Draft, Secret

**B:** Memorandum, Phillip Farley to Hugh Cumming, Director of Intelligence and Research, "Post-Mortem on SNIE 100-8-60," 28 January 1961

**Source:** RG 59, Records of Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Outer Space, 1948-1961, box 501, Z1.50 Country File Israel f. Reactor 1961, Part 1 of 2

This "post-mortem" study on SNIE 100-8-60 is one of the most intriguing documents in this collection. Its aim was to explain why the US intelligence community had failed to detect in real time the Israeli nuclear project, and indeed how late it was in making that determination. The chronology, on pages 8 through 17, provides an account of what was known, and when, about the Israeli nuclear program, concluding that Washington might have seen through Israeli "secrecy or deception" and better understood Israeli intentions at least a year earlier if the "atomic energy intelligence community had properly interpreted" the available information. In essence, the overall conclusion was that the root cause of the delay was not so much the absence of information as that some important reports and items of information had been lost in the shuffle and the dots not properly connected.

As the classification of this document is only "secret," and the document is relatively brief and deliberately vague about the intelligence means and sources employed in the final determination (e.g. it does not refer explicitly to the U-2 flights), it is possible that the intelligence community had more sensitive information that it excluded from this version of the post-mortem or that a more thorough report on the subject existed with higher classification.

[Note: Several of the documents reproduced above were first published 1998 in "[Israel and the Bomb](#)" edited by Avner Cohen.]

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## NOTES

[1] Shimon Peres, *Battling for Peace: Memoirs*, Edited by David Landau (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), 133-35.

[2] Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 44-47, 50- 52, 65, 81-82.

[3] Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 49-55, 57-60.

[4] Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 32-34, 60-62, 83, 87.

[5] Note by Avner Cohen: During interviews I conducted in the 1990s for *Israel and the Bomb* I heard from different people more conspiratorial explanations for the U.S. intelligence failure on Dimona. Some interviewees claimed that certain people in the U.S. intelligence community were sympathetic to the Israelis and deliberately concealed or bypassed certain information instead of passing it along. For example, the late John Hadden, the CIA station chief in Tel Aviv from 1964-68, held that view strongly. He asked me to treat his suspicions with discretion so I did not publicize them when he was alive. According to Seymour Hersh's *The Samson Option* (New York: Random House, 1991), the AEC chairman, Lewis Strauss, "knew as much about Dimona as anybody in the intelligence community by the time he left the AEC in 1958. There is no evidence, however, that he raised questions about the Israeli weapons program while in government. He most certainly did not tell McCone about it." (83, 90) There are others who also believed that senior officials of the Eisenhower administration, including President Eisenhower himself, had known about Dimona early on but decided not to interfere. According to Dino A. Brugioni, who served at the CIA Photographic Intelligence Center, when U-2 photos of the excavations of the Beersheba site were taken sometimes in early-mid 1958 the activity was determined to be a "probable" nuclear-related site. The photos were shown by the Center director, Arthur C. Lundahl, to both President Eisenhower and AEC chair Lewis Strauss, but neither reacted. "Lundahl and Brugioni were left with the impression that Eisenhower wanted Israel to acquire nuclear weapons" (*Israel and the Bomb*, 83). The same anecdote appears in much greater detail in Hersh's *The Samson Option* (50-59).

[6] Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 90-95; Avner Cohen, *The Worst-Kept Bargain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 60-62.

[7] Choosing this strategy created long-term risks and problems as well. In essence, it made it much more difficult for Israel to extract any security benefits from, or for, the nuclear project, even if Israel was willing at some point in the future to trade the project's products for other security benefits. For a more detailed analysis of this evasive disclosure strategy, see Cohen, *The Worst-Kept Secret*, 61-62.

[8] When we refer to intelligence community, we mean not only the CIA, but also intelligence offices of the Atomic Energy Commission, the Department of State, and the armed services, all of which played a role in collecting and/or analyzing information about Dimona.

[9] On the French-Israeli 1954 bilateral agreement of cooperation in the field of atomic energy, based on the Israeli patents, see Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 32-34.

[10] Indeed, Bergmann and his IAEC were hardly consulted, let alone involved in the negotiations that Shimon Peres had conducted with the French. As became known years later, Peres, who was Dimona's prime visionary and promoter, decided to compartmentalize and bypass Bergmann and the IAEC almost entirely about Dimona. In February 1958 all seven IAEC members except Bergmann resigned; the details of this incident remain obscure but it may have been a protest against the exclusion of the IAEC. There was even a time when Bergmann was not allowed to visit the Dimona site. See Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 14-17, 67-71.

[11] Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 16-17.

[12] For background, see Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 60-62; Kristine Werdelin Bergan, editor, "The Norway-United Kingdom-Israel Heavy Water Deal, 1957-1959: New Translations from Norwegian Archives," forthcoming electronic dossier for the Nuclear Proliferation International History Project.

[13] See "UK Helped Israel Get Nuclear Bomb," [BBC News](#), 4 August 2005; David Leigh, "US kept in the dark as secret nuclear deal was struck," [The Guardian](#), 3 August 2005; "Britain's dirty secret: Exclusive - Secret papers show how Britain helped Israel make the A-bomb in the 1960s," [The New Statesman](#), 13 March 2006. See also the Foreign Office Statement, 9 March 2006, [BBC Two](#).

[14] Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 62, 83.

[15] On the U-2 issue, Seymour Hersh provides a fascinating and persuasive account, but the recollections of key participants need to be supported by government records. See *The Samson Option*, at pages 50-58.

[16] Warren Kornberg, "Israel Reactor 'Not Revealed to Us,' Says McCone, Avoiding Word 'Secret,'" *The Washington Post*, 19 December 1960. See also, Hersh, *The Samson Option*, 77.

[17] *Ibid.*, 71-72, for McCone's role in leaking to the New York Times.

[18] The U.S. Operations Mission managed U.S. foreign aid programs.

[19] "U.S. Welcome Israel Promises on Reactor," *The Washington Post*, 23 December 1960.

[20] Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 92-93.

[21] In 1986, Norway asked Israel whether the heavy water had been used in ways that were consistent with the agreement's "peaceful uses" conditions. See Charles R. Babcock, "Norway Eyes Israel's Use of Nuclear Ingredient," *Washington Post*, 10 November 1986.

[22] Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 93-95.