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By JLH NARA, Date 7-2-03

Attached is Eshkol to LBJ "message" I mentioned. Mike's facts are off, so you'd better have the real poop.

As you know, this issue became a pain in the neck to JFK, because he had to press personally and repeatedly for access. He first discussed it with BG here in May 1961, then got general assurances from Golda Meir in December. We first proposed semi-annual visits in April 1963. After BG resigned, JFK wrote Eshkol. Latter finally wrote JFK on 19 August that "In your letter of 5 June . . . you further propose that from June 1964 invitations to US representatives to visit D. be extended at intervals of six months. Having considered this request, I believe that we shall be able to reach agreement on the future schedule of visits."

Thus Eshkol carefully avoided a firm commitment, but we decided to act as if he had agreed. JFK confirmed our understanding in 26 Aug. letter. After January 1964 Dimona visit, LBJ in thanking Eshkol via oral message did same, saying "we look forward to future semi-annual visits agreed upon."

Contrary to Mike, this issue was not raised during June 1964 Eshkol visit (according to Mike's own debrief). Nor was question of putting Dimona under IAEA pressed (we pressed only on small lkw reactor we supplied). We asked in late September for next visit, which led to latest Eshkol ploy.

Even accepting that only annual visits were agreed (Mike sounds more categorical than Israelis on this point), Eshkol's new request that we postpone this till after November 1965 (with prospect then of further delay if past experience is any guide) could leave Dimona uninspected for up to two years since it has gone critical. At a minimum we need a McCone/AEC judgment as to what this could entail, e. g. could Israelis siphon off much in that period?

We also need a better fix on Israeli domestic political angle raised by Eshkol. Our embassy and State haven't seen the same threat to Eshkol 1965 victory that Mike reports. Nor is it clear how our very discreet inspections could get blown.

While we want to be responsive to Eshkol's neatly couched personal plea, the long and painful history of our efforts to gain Dimona access argues for looking hard before we leap. I haven't yet mentioned this to State, at Mike's request, but certainly we must do so and give LBJ both sides of story.

RWK