

May 28, 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

The Eshkol visit may be a strenuous one. Eshkol is being briefed to the nines on every issue which might arise. Also it is peculiar to US/Israeli relations that even secondary issues often can only be settled at the top level.

Even so, we're confident this exercise will be a success: (a) Eshkol needs to make it one even more than we do; (b) we have a very forthcoming menu planned. In fact, the only big risk is that we'll look so friendly as to create extra Arab problems, following hard on Khrushchev's all-out pandering to the Arabs in Cairo.

1. The sheer fact that Eshkol is the first Israeli PM ever to visit officially marks a big political plus for him. He'll portray the visit as a success almost regardless of how much bacon he takes home.
2. The Israelis seem actually relieved that we're helping them find tanks elsewhere (they apparently expected a flat turndown). They'll keep pressure on us till another deal can be arranged (and we're still far from it), but the heat won't be too intense just now.
3. We can also offer more financial aid, if tank purchases elsewhere create an extra burden.
4. Most important, we can carry your February desalting offer a big step further by offering a prompt go-ahead on joint feasibility studies, and a promise of financial help if the studies pan out. This could easily be the biggest public plus of the visit.
5. We'll also get some very good public noises in speeches and communique. For example, if Eshkol will publicly deny any expansionist ambitions (big Arab beef), perhaps we can reiterate our stand against Arab aggression too.

Substance of the Visit. I've underlined and annotated State's extensive briefing book because you'll want to be up to date on the issues Eshkol will raise (the Israelis will hang on everything you say, and repeat it later). Since we won't be able to brief you this weekend, I'll try to summarize everything in this memo. We can also lay on a briefing session Monday morning if you desire.

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1. Reassurance to Israel. To get the meeting off on an ideal footing, and disarm Eshkol, why not tell him right off the bat that the US stands foursquare behind Israel's security and well-being. This has in fact been the consistent policy of the US since 1947. We don't intend to let Israel go under; to the contrary we have from the outset done more than any other country to help build it up (including over \$1 billion in aid).

While we have necessarily had to maintain an element of superficial balance in our public posture, and have at times disagreed with Israeli policy, the record of our support is crystal clear. This has cost us much with the Arabs, and given the Soviets a big opening to exploit, but we don't intend to swerve from this policy.

The one thing we ask of Israel is not to keep trying to force us to an all-out pro-Israeli policy. We ask this not just because a balanced policy is essential strategically to keep the Soviets out of the ME, and economically because of oil but because it is as much in Israel's interest as ours. If we choose Israel's side so openly that the Arabs form alliances with Moscow, Israel loses just as much as we. Our present policy gives the Arabs an incentive not to swing too far away from the West. This is simple common sense.

2. Our Jordan Waters stand is just the latest example of our support. We designed the Johnston Plan and stand fully by it, as the Arabs know.

3. Desalting. We recognize how vital water is to Israel's future, and since readily available sources are about exhausted you have personally inaugurated a new joint enterprise to exploit desalting--the only great new hope for water. We will be as forthcoming here as the still uncertain state of the art will allow. We'll work jointly with Israel to survey what kind of nuclear desalting plant would be technically and economically best, and would be prepared to help finance a plant if and when a mutually satisfactory scheme can be worked out (this could cost us as much as a \$100 million loan).

4. Israel's own deterrent posture. We've always kept a close eye on the Arab-Israeli military balance. Our JCS and intelligence people just reviewed it again, and see Israel as able to maintain quite a deterrent edge for the foreseeable future. We also think Israelis tend to discount the US deterrent role, though we're confident the Arabs know the score (McNamara will brief Eshkol on our capabilities). We've always regarded

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our economic aid as permitting Israel to buy enough modern arms in Europe to compensate for our inability to provide them directly. Even so, when nothing else was available we came through on HAWKs.

5. Tanks. We appreciate Eshkol's understanding as to why we simply can't afford to sell Israel tanks directly. But we'll do everything we can to help get them elsewhere. Eshkol will probably say he's grateful for our proffered help, but is dubious over whether Israel can get what it needs elsewhere. He will probably make a strong pitch that only M-48A3s from Germany will do. Since a German deal (even through another intermediary) looks questionable so far, we must insist that the Israelis consider the UK Centurion, which is available. It hasn't got the range of our M-48A3, but is otherwise just as good, and our military say it's adequate to meet Israel's defensive needs. My instinct is that Israel will make every effort to get M-48s, but fall back on the UK if this fails. So we ought to make every effort to help them with the Germans, but not let them come back to us if this aborts.

6. Other arms requests. Eshkol may, in the course of describing Israeli security worries, mention other arms needs, such as the jet bombers he mentioned to Feldman, or some counter to the UAR's Soviet-supplied missile boats. Our response is that our JCS and intelligence people see Israel as still able to maintain quite a deterrent edge. Nor should the Israelis forget our own deterrent support.

7. The UAR Missile Threat and Israel's Own Missile Plans. We've been over this ground many times unsuccessfully, but Feldman put Eshkol on notice that you'd have a personal try. Attached (Tab A) is a Defense study which counters the latest Israeli allegations (now it's chemical warheads). Perhaps the best argument with Eshkol is that his military (like our own so often) may have sold him on a very expensive and dangerous counter to a threat they hadn't really evaluated. We probably can't get Israel to cancel its existing French contract (which may be only for R and D missiles, though we just don't know). We can't veto Israel's missile plans, but as Israel's security guarantors we're entitled to ask it not to buy operational missiles until after it has consulted us.

8. Dimona Reactor. We appreciate Israel's commitment to regular inspection but are disturbed at Eshkol's refusal to let us reassure the Arabs in general terms (you sent Eshkol two messages on this). We're firmly convinced that Israel's apparent desire to keep the Arabs guessing is highly dangerous. To appear to be going nuclear without really doing so is to invite

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trouble. It might spark Nasser into a foolish pre-emptive move. Without in any way implying that Israel is going nuclear, one has to admit that a functioning secret breeder reactor plus an oncoming missile delivery system add up to an inescapable conclusion that Israel is at least putting itself in a position to go nuclear. This could have the gravest repercussions on US-Israeli relations, and the earlier we try to halt it the better chance we have. This is why your raising a to-do about missiles, even if unsuccessful, will at least put Israel firmly on notice that we may be back at it again.

9. IAEA Controls. Israel's reluctance to accept IAEA controls also adds to our suspicions. We can't make Israel an exception because we're making sixty or so other clients of ours toe the IAEA line. The immediate issue is over renewal of a piddling 1-MW research reactor, but any new reactor on which we help Israel would have to be under IAEA. We hope you'll personally tell Eshkol they should bite the bullet now.

10. Economic Aid. Israel's economy is doing so well that Dave Bell sees no economic justification for new AID loans. Israel has had a fantastic 9-10% growth rate, has over \$600 million reserves, a per capita income of over \$1,000 (better than Italy), etc. While Eshkol worries over Israel's great foreign debt, fact is that Israel bonds are being paid off mostly in Israeli pounds for tourism et al. However, Eshkol is determined to show that Israel still needs help, and there may be a political requirement here. Bell hopes we can keep trend downward from \$20 million DL this year, but could live with \$10 million per annum in 1965 (our presentation was \$0-10) and 1966. But we would want to make clear that this is help in financing indirectly Israel's arms purchases, i. e. an additional incentive for them to go to European suppliers.

11. Our Arab Policy. No one can blame the Israelis, surrounded as they are, for repeatedly sniping at our Arab policy. The top people want to believe that we know what we're doing (and many Israelis agree with our policy), but they've been conditioned by living under the gun for so long to a "fortress Israel" psychology which leads them to over-react. In turn, the constant Arab verbal attacks are in reality a reflection of Arab frustration at their own impotence.

We want to avoid at all costs a situation in which we become lined up so overtly behind Israel that the Arabs choose the USSR as their champion. It is Soviet arms, not US wheat, which creates the real threat to Israel.

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The greater the Soviet presence in the Middle East, the greater the threat to Israel. If you will only drive home these facts of life politely but firmly to Eshkol, it will help mightily in toning down the kind of repeated pressure from Israel and its friends which poses such a dilemma for us in the Middle East.

R. W. Komer

R. W. Komer

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Summary of topics Prime Minister Eshkol may raise during U.S. visit; desalting; military aid; tanks; UAR missile threat; Israel's missile plans. Dimona reactor; U.S. Arab policy; economic aid; IAEA controls. White House, 28 May 1964. U. S. Declassified Documents Online, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349271207/USDD?u=wash74137&sid=USDD&xid=53d43aa5>. Accessed 9 July 2020.



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