

Reports of Visits to Dimona Reactor by U.S. Government Representatives

Sitting 79 of the Sixth Knesset

5 July 1966 (17 Tammuz 5726)

Y. Bader (Gahal): Mr. Speaker, Knesset Members, I am not a member of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and I do not know precisely what goes on at the atomic research station in Dimona. In my view, it would be preferable for that enterprise to be under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Culture or the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, but whatever the allocation of responsibility may be, the entire Government is responsible to the Knesset....There have recently been reports of dubious activities at the plant, and this is a matter for the State Comptroller and the Finance Committee....

When the Israeli public is kept in the dark about something, we hear all about it from America. I read in the *New York Times* that there have already been three secret visits to the reactor by Americans, and that these are an annual—and hence regular—occurrence, making them of a supervisory nature....I also read that the object of those visits is to allay the fears of the Arabs....All this is very serious, for who knows what is leaked to Arab diplomats....It is not customary for a country to publish the results of its secret research...and I fail to see why we should engage in research so that American experts can pass our findings on to our enemies!...It is our concern for Israel's honor and sovereignty which leads us to ask why American experts should visit the atomic reactor in Dimona on a regular basis. I can understand one visit, to show off the buildings, the roads, the cleanliness, the dome (almost like St. Peter's in Rome), but why the subsequent ones? These are no courtesy or goodwill visits....

This entire affair is an affront to Israel's honor, sovereignty and international position....Why shouldn't the French, the British or anyone else pay annual visits too...? We appear to have voluntarily seceded part of our sovereignty and agreed to foreign supervision of our affairs. The Government should have turned down the initial request to visit the plant...and should certainly never have permitted the second visit....The condition of secrecy has not been kept....The Government must stop all future visits and must also complain about this leak. Our country is small but is no less precious to us than the U.S. is to the members of the State Department....Our sovereignty must be more precious to us than that of any other country...particularly because we are young and small....

Our future requires that the Government speak out clearly. Our tendency is not to admit the mistakes of the past...but henceforth this matter must stop. There must be no more visits, whether regular or occasional, by foreigners to Dimona, whatever country they may represent....We propose that the Knesset discuss this subject because it is of vital importance to us all....

The Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, L. Eshkol: Mr. Speaker, distinguished Knesset, I appreciate MK Bader's astonishment and complaint....Although he also said much that was irrelevant, the burden of his speech concerned what was published about visits, or supervision....I would like to say that in everything it does, Israel preserves its sovereignty meticulously. There has been no supervision...of the atomic research reactor in Dimona. Since 1961 American scientists have visited it as guests of the Government of Israel, that is, at the invitation of the Government of Israel....

I can assure the Knesset that in the future, too, we will preserve Israel's sovereignty....There is no reason to fear that these guests will give false reports to anyone...and you have heard what they have reported....After all this, I think the Knesset will agree with me that there is no cause to hold a debate on this subject....I propose that because of its delicacy the subject be transferred to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee for discussion....

(The proposal to transfer the subject to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee is adopted.)

The Speaker, J. Serlin: We will now hear statements from those who abstained. I give the floor to MK Wilner....

M. Wilner (Rakah): Mr. Speaker, distinguished Knesset...is the subject really as simple as the Prime Minister has tried to show? If the Government of Israel simply invites American scientists to visit the reactor in Dimona why should this be done under a veil of secrecy...? If everything is so simple, why are we so incensed about the leak to the American paper?

We oppose any foreign supervision of the State of Israel. Israel must jealously maintain its national sovereignty and independence. What is concealed from the two and a half million inhabitants of Israel cannot be laid bare before American or other scientists who have not come as tourists....The Prime Minister has proposed transferring the subject to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee "because of the delicacy of the subject." The matter must be very serious indeed, in that case, and just as we oppose foreign supervision, we are against any word or deed in the direction of atomic arms. We favor making this region a nuclear-free zone...and reiterate our demand that the Knesset agree to nuclear disarmament. The Government's evasive stand on this issue

adds a dangerous dimension to the Prime Minister's reference to "the delicacy of the subject."...

S. Peres (Rafi): Mr. Speaker, distinguished Knesset, there are matters of supreme importance on which the nation should be united and which should be discussed in confidence by the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. My party would have supported both a united policy and a discussion in the appropriate forum were the real subject only the leak to the *New York Times*. But the Government, which seeks to transfer the subject to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, is a prime source of almost daily leaks to the press on this subject, without requesting a debate in the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. Why did a Government spokesman announce last week that the visits were made with the agreement of the French...and that they did not interfere with the work...? Why did we read in yesterday's papers that I am unfit to represent Israel at a private conference on the subject...? I would like to tell the Prime Minister that it is intolerable that we should be permitted to express our criticism only in a closed committee while you may leak damaging statements about my party to the press...disregarding the harm this does to the subject in hand and the country as a whole....

I have just returned from a conference at which that subject was discussed at great length. It is true that Ghana, which advocates disarmament, was not invited, but all the countries which have something to say on the subject were....I saw that, unfortunately, there does not seem to be any likelihood of restricting the growth of nuclear weapons in the world, not because of Israel but because the Powers do not agree with one another....The world is no longer divided up by geographical area but by scientific level....Hardly anyone believes that the nuclear disarmament of the Middle East can be attained separately from the conventional arms race....What I am saying is directed at the members of Mapai and Mapam....

In the wake of what the Prime Minister said—after having been quoted by the Foreign Ministry on this subject, I propose that the Government distinguish between what we tell our friends, who include the U.S.A., and what we avoid telling our enemies. I do not understand why Israel has to allay Nasser's fears...from the Knesset podium. I know that the Arabs suspect us. I know that that suspicion has a deterrent effect. Why should we dispel that effect? By saying this I am advocating neither the dissemination nor the restriction of nuclear arms.

N. Peled (Mapam): That suspicion encourages an atomic arms race.

S. Peres (Rafi): MK Peled, the difference between us is that I do not think that Nasser needs energy pills. He is sufficiently encouraged as it is, and it was not lack of energy which prevented him embarking on the rockets race.

U. Avneri (Ha'Olam Hazeh-Ko'ah Hadash): What about "Shavit 2"? Why was it fired just before the elections?

S. Peres (Rafi): "Shavit 2" was fired after Nasser had purchased rockets from the U.S. and decided to fire them a few days later. The Knesset Members should know that persons who have no connection with the elections participated in discussing "Shavit 2." I am convinced that the issue was decided on its merits. As we know, Nasser began the rockets race before "Shavit 2" was fired. Some people here, who have an amazing knowledge and understanding of what Nasser does, would do well to examine the dates of events and not solely the explanations published afterwards....

Rafi abstained from voting in favor of transferring the subject to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee because the Government is conducting its internal policy...by leaking information to the press while asking the Opposition to restrict its criticisms to a confidential forum....

U. Avneri (Ha'Olam Hazeh-Ko'ah Hadash): Distinguished Speaker and Knesset, I agree with the previous speaker on one point, namely, that the secrecy of the visit has grim implications for the way the country is run. Against whom was the secrecy directed—the world, potential enemies or Israel's people, press and Knesset? The main point, however, is that the Government of Israel is succumbing instead of initiating, taking steps under pressure which could have served as a starting point for a great political move had they been taken voluntarily and in accordance with our interests.

No one could have had any doubt—except, perhaps, for the previous speaker—that on this subject the world would not watch what we did, or did not do, with indifference....That being so, why did we not initiate a great political campaign? Why did we not propose the nuclear disarmament of the region directly to the Arab world...? There are very few subjects on which Israel can convince the opposing side to speak directly; this is one of them. The Arab world is concerned about what Israel is doing, or not doing, or might do, in the nuclear sphere. That concern could have been put to great political use in order, for the first time, to attain a direct dialogue with the Arab countries.

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Personal Statement by the Foreign Minister, A. Eban

The Foreign Minister, A. Eban: Madam Speaker, distinguished Knesset, MK Peres' speech obliges me to make the following statement:

MK Peres' assumption that the Foreign Ministry or the Foreign Minister is interested in his participation or non-participation in con-

ferences in Canada is both arrogant and unfounded. Neither I nor my Ministry care where the honorable Knesset Member wanders and in which symposia he takes part. On the other hand, I have every right to propose to organizations to which I belong and with which I maintain relations that additional invitations be sent to other people regardless of who has already been invited....If MK Peres requires reassurance, allow me to repeat that I am completely indifferent to his visit to Canada or anywhere else.

Anything a public servant, including MK Peres, says lays him open to criticism. This evening he split the Knesset on a subject upon which it should have been united, speaking clearly about the need to be vague and stressing in public the importance of distinguishing between what we say to friends and enemies. He revealed this tactical wisdom on a subject of the utmost delicacy to friends and enemies alike....

MK Peres claimed that a Government spokesman had arbitrarily said something which he did not say regarding French permission for visits to Dimona. No such statement was made or published anywhere. The Deputy Minister of Defense said quite rightly that Israel's efforts to secure arms in the U.S. were made with the knowledge of the French, which is a very different thing....In a voice charged with emotion, MK Peres complained that others refuse to be impressed by his etatism, but someone who constantly and continually represents himself as being a great etatist lays himself open to criticism on that score, and cannot prevent me from doubting the superiority of his credentials in this. Be that as it may, the nation judged his etatism in November, and that is sufficient for me....

Sitting 81 of the Sixth Knesset

11 July 1966 (23 Tammuz 5726)

Personal Statement by MK S. Peres

S. Peres (Rafi): Mr. Speaker, distinguished Knesset, 1. In a personal statement from this podium on July 3 this year the Foreign Minister claimed that neither he nor the Foreign Ministry was interested in my participation in international conferences. This seems to indicate that there are two Foreign Ministries, one which leaks information at length about its attitude on this to *Ma'ariv*, as published on 1 July 1966, and one which is "indifferent." I rejoice at the Foreign Minister's belated indifference to the supposed "arrogance" of others. It is regrettable, however, that it has emerged only post factum....

2. The Foreign Minister accused me of "splitting" the Knesset on a subject upon which it should have been united. I am consoled by the fact that he has come to the conclusion that we should have been united on that subject.

3. The Foreign Minister maintains that I stressed "in public" the need to distinguish between what we say to our friends and our enemies. What I said was that we must distinguish between what we "tell our friends and avoid telling our enemies." The Foreign Minister should be more careful when quoting others, even "in public."

4. ...I am glad to note that the Foreign Minister did not deny having given the information to *Ma'ariv*.

5. The most serious point is his claim that I said that a Government spokesman "had arbitrarily said something which he did not say regarding French permission for visits to Dimona. No such statement was made or published anywhere." I would have understood had the Foreign Minister said "not made," but "not published" is contradicted by the facts, because the front page of *Ha'aretz* of 29 June 1966 mentions "a closed meeting of Ministry of Defense employees from the atomic reactor at Dimona" at Mapai House in Dimona at which the French permission granted for visits to the reactor by Americans was referred to by a Government spokesman....That spokesman told me, after my speech in the Knesset, that in speaking of French permission he meant solely the purchase of arms from the U.S.A....

6. ...Mr. Eban mentioned the results of the elections in November....We both have the right to adapt our views to what emerges as victorious or to continue fighting for what we believe is right....Thank you.