

Middle East  
Section

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Secretary of State

משרד החוץ  
לונדון

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Prime Minister

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MENAD

10th June 1981

The Foreign Secretary mentioned  
his this morning.

PS  
PS/LPS  
PS/Mr Hunt  
PS/plus  
Sir J. Fisher  
Mr J. Moberly  
MED  
JNU  
News Dept

Dear Secretary of State

I have been instructed to transmit to you the  
enclosed letter from Mr. Yitzhak Shamir, Minister of  
Foreign Affairs of Israel.

Sincerely

*[Handwritten signature]*

for  
Amb

*[Handwritten signature]*

Shlomo Argov  
Ambassador of Israel

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Carrington, PC, KCMG, MC  
Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
London, SW1



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שגרירות ישראל  
לונדון

Jerusalem, June 9, 1981

"My Dear Colleague,

After the destruction last Sunday by the Israeli Air Force of the Osirak, atomic reactor near Baghdad, I would like to share with you some of the reasons which forced us to take this extreme step.

Israel has long been concerned about Iraq's nuclear development programme. All the information in our possession indicated that the Osirak reactor was designed to enable Iraq to develop a nuclear weapons capacity. A few weeks ago, reports reached Israel indicating that the reactor was to go critical between July and September of this year.

The Government of Israel was thereupon faced with a terrible dilemma: should it let this development go unchallenged, which could endanger the existence of Israel and engulf the whole region in a nuclear war, with all the implications for the world as a whole, or is it to confront this new and ominous danger and take action in self-defence to prevent, or at least postpone, the Iraqi threat to use nuclear weapons in our area.

In the timing of its action, the Government of Israel was guided by the knowledge that the reactor was about to become critical. Obviously, the destruction of a "hot" reactor would be impossible without creating an acute danger of radiation, in particular as the Osirak reactor is located less than 20 kms. distance from Baghdad. It was with this in mind that Israel refrained from taking action against the Tamuz II research reactor, as well as a smaller Soviet supplied research reactor, both of which are operational and whose bombardment could release substantial amounts of radiation.



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In view of the nature and the record of the Iraqi regime, I must underline the enormous dangers inherent in the creation of an Iraqi nuclear potential. It cannot be forgotten that Iraq actively participated in wars against Israel in 1948, 1967 and 1973, and continues to regard itself as in a state of war with Israel.

Israel repeatedly appealed to nations which supplied Iraq with nuclear technology and material, pointing out the grave dangers which such supply posed to the peace of this region and to Israel in particular. We stressed, that that aid was liable to re-ignite the flames of conflict in the region and to put to nought the efforts to reach a peace settlement. We reiterated that everything be done to prevent Iraq from attaining a military nuclear capability. We also urged other friendly governments, including Her Majesty's Government, to use their influence in this direction.

Unfortunately, these appeals did not have the effect we so fervently desired and the pace of Iraq's nuclear development increased until it reached the stage when the Osirak reactor was about to go critical which would have posed to us a nearly unsolvable problem.

Under the cover of the NPT, Iraq was obtaining help from various quarters in disregard of the manifest dangers the nuclear arming of Iraq would pose to the peace of the Middle East and the world. At the same time, Israeli efforts, at the United Nations, to advance the cause of establishing a nuclear-weapon free zone in the Middle East have so far been spurned by Iraq. Israel will continue to pursue this course.

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In closing, I can only reiterate once again that the decision which my government took in self-defence was not only one of the most agonizing ones which we ever had to take, but also one from which, in responsibility to our people and to world peace, we could not shrink.

Sincerely yours,

Yitzhak Shamir  
Minister of Foreign Affairs".

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