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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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APR 3 1969

MEMORANDUM

TO : The Secretary

THROUGH: S/S

FROM : NEA - Joseph J. Sisco *JJS*

SUBJECT: Israel's Nuclear Policy and Implications for
the United States -- BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

Israel's Official Policy. Israel has said publicly, as well as giving us private assurances to the same effect, that it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. In a recent public statement, Ambassador Rabin made it clear that this assurance applied to acquisition of nuclear weapons by other area states, and not, for example, to the presence of nuclear weapons with the US Sixth Fleet. Israel has not, however, signed the NPT, even though all Arab countries except Algeria and Saudi Arabia have now signed. Officially the GOI position is that it has not yet reached a decision one way or the other on signature, and that it is studying the full implications of this step.

Israel's Nuclear Intentions. Underneath this official posture, our intelligence indicates that Israel is rapidly developing a capability to produce and deploy nuclear weapons, and to deliver them by surface-to-surface missile or by plane. We do not know whether the political decision to manufacture complete nuclear weapons has been taken by Israel's leaders, but there is little doubt that the green light has been given to Israeli technicians to develop the capability to build a bomb at short notice. Our negotiations with Israel for the sale of Phantom aircraft last November

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2

revealed that the USG and Israel may have differing notions as to what would constitute the "introduction" of nuclear weapons into the area. Israel may be intending to follow a "last wire" concept, whereby all the components for a weapon are at hand, awaiting only final assembly and testing.

It is our assessment that in the absence of progress toward a peace settlement, Israel's leaders have probably decided Israel cannot afford to surrender the nuclear option. We cannot predict whether, when, or in what manner Israel may choose to display a nuclear weapon. We believe its ultimate decision will be based upon political and strategic considerations. Israel is aware of the adverse repercussions, both diplomatic and in terms of world opinion, that it must expect if it becomes known that it possesses nuclear weapons. Such repercussions are not in our judgment decisive factors, but they are probably important enough for Israel not to risk them except for compelling reasons. That point might come when Israel feels its margin of superiority in conventional weapons is no longer sufficient to be a clear deterrent to the Arabs from launching an attack.

Implications for the U.S. In the meantime, Israel's continued delay in signing the NPT, plus intelligence available to many states indicating that Israel is working on a weapons capability, is leading to a growing assumption on the part of other states that Israel either has or shortly will have atomic weapons. If this process continues, and it becomes generally assumed that Israel has the bomb, it will have far-reaching and even dangerous implications for the U.S.:

(a) Other nuclear capable countries would be more likely to opt in favor of nuclear weapons for themselves and, even if they did not decide to produce weapons immediately, would be less likely to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

(b) Israel's possession of nuclear weapons would do nothing to deter Arab guerrilla warfare or reduce Arab irrationality; on the contrary it would add a dangerous new element to Arab-Israeli hostility with added risk of confrontation between the US and USSR.

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(c) Arab frustrations would increase with the effect that they would be even less willing to contemplate moving toward a political settlement.

(d) The Arabs would hold the US responsible for allowing Israel to go nuclear and US interests in the Arab world would suffer proportionately.

(e) Until the Arabs could develop nuclear weapons, they might seek, and get, Soviet agreement to extend a "nuclear umbrella" to the Arab states. Even if this did not occur, the Arabs would be thrown into greater military and psychological dependence on the USSR, providing the latter with greater opportunities to expand its influence among the Arab states.

(f) The Arabs would begin to try to develop nuclear weapons of their own, and although this might take some time, eventually they would succeed. Once both sides were so armed, Israel, with its small geographic size and easily targetable population centers, would be the more vulnerable.

For all these reasons, we regard it as one of the most important objectives of our Middle East policy to head off Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons and nuclear-capable strategic missiles, and to get Israel to sign and ratify the NPT so that the Arabs and the world can have reasonable confidence in an Israeli policy of forbearance. But we are running short of time. The farther along the Israeli program gets, the less chance there will be of persuading the Israelis to abandon it.

What Can the U.S. Do About It? There are only two considerations that are likely to induce the Israelis to abandon their nuclear weapons option. The first and most decisive would be if there were a peace settlement between Israel and the Arabs. The other would be if the United States told the Israelis that if it actually embarks on the manufacture of nuclear weapons it would cause a fundamental change in the US-Israel relationship, including our long-standing concern for Israel's security. We would have to make it clear that we were talking about our willingness to continue to be a major supplier of conventional weapons to Israel. To make the Israelis believe

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in our determination, we would have to show that we are prepared to have the issue become public and to defend our position in the face of domestic pressures. Short of using US influence on this scale, it will be futile, and probably counter-productive for the US to resort to half-way measures, such as attempting to use Israeli requests for conventional weapons as leverage on this issue.

A Deal with the Soviets. An understanding with the Soviets that in return for their willingness to limit conventional arms shipments to the Arabs we would seek to induce the Israelis to abandon their nuclear option, remains a possibility, but in our opinion only a remote one. In our past probes of the Soviets on the possibility of arms control in the Middle East they have given us no indication to encourage us to think they would be interested in such a deal. Their latest position is that they would be willing to discuss arms control to the area, but only after Israel withdraws from occupied Arab territory. We may wish to renew our probes of the Soviets on this question at some appropriate time, but we cannot, in my judgment, rest our policy on the long-shot possibility that we will be able to work something out with the Soviets. Our chances of influencing Israel's policy basically hangs on the extent to which we are willing to make this a crunch issue in our relations with Israel.

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