

March 26, 1969

Memorandum from Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 'Nuclear Missile Capability in Israel'

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Summary:

A proposal from JCS Chairman Earle Wheeler favored a presidential-level approach and the application of pressure. Wheeler presented a range of options but recommended a demand to "cease-and-desist" a specific nuclear-related activity.

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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

JCSM-181-69
26 March 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: Nuclear Missile Capability in Israel (e)

1. (TS) Reference is made to your memorandum, dated 17 March 1969, which requested comment on possible indicators of the status of Israeli nuclear missile development, the means which the United States may have to affect the Israeli program, and recommendations as to the relative merit of those means.

2. (e) Detailed intelligence on the Israeli Advanced Weapons Program is contained in a DIA publication of that title, control number TCS-657029-69, updated 21 March 1969. This is available through SAO channels.

3. (TS/NF/RD) Indicators

a. Israel is in possession of at least one MD-620, JERICHO, 270-mile, 2,200-pound warhead missile and has in being at least five facilities capable of supporting an indigenous missile development/production program. The JERICHO, developed by the French firm, M. Dassault, under contract, is a mobile system probably requiring no hardened firing sites. Its deployment, therefore, may be difficult to detect. Twenty-five missiles were scheduled for the test/development program, 18 were used, and the remaining seven contracted for delivery to Israel by mid-1969. Two missiles (one inert in 1967 and one live in July 1968) have been reported delivered to Israel. Reliable reports indicate that the first of the Israeli-produced missiles will be completed in late spring or summer of this year. It is likely that a native-produced missile would require at least a limited flight test program prior to or concurrent with operational deployment. Such a test program will confirm the possession and active production of Israeli-produced JERICHOs.

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E.O. 13526, section 3.3(b)(1)(6)

b. It is believed that the Israelis have made a decision to [redacted] state that [redacted], and that, beginning in 1969, Israel plans to produce and deploy up to 60 missiles, [redacted].

c. Uranium supplies in Israel, including those known to have been acquired at a premium from Argentina (presumably to avoid safeguards), will support the production of fissionable material in quantities sufficient for a small number of weapons. Whether Israel plans to employ plutonium or enriched uranium for weapons is not known. For the former, a chemical separation plant for separation of plutonium is required. That such a plant exists cannot be stated with certainty. If enriched uranium is to be the fissionable material, physical separation by gaseous centrifuge is the most probable method. It is believed that an effort to develop the gas centrifuge method has been underway for some years, but the state of development is unknown.

E.O. 13526, section 3.3(b)(1)(6)

d. Interest in certain filter materials and other uniquely identifiable materials, tools, and specifically knowledgeable persons, as in the past, is an indication of [redacted]. Whether or not Israel [redacted] depends upon the degree of confidence it has in the [redacted]. Without detailed foreign design information to supplement indigenous efforts, Israel would probably desire [redacted]. However, there are reports which indicate the Israelis may have acquired [redacted].

[redacted] This last is in accord with current Israeli public statements referring to introduction of weapons into the Middle East.

e. Israel has historically denied it would be the first to introduce nuclear weapons in the area. However, a clear interpretation of the meaning "introduce" as used by Israel is open to question. During the F-4 negotiations, the meaning "an unannounced, untested capability" was not considered "introduction," whereas an "announced and tested capability" was considered "introduction" in the Israeli interpretation of the term. Therefore, an Israeli recommended change in terminology could be an indicator of a move away from a nuclear capability. Lack of any change to the hard Israeli position with respect to the Nonproliferation Treaty would probably indicate continuation of an Israeli plan to develop nuclear weapons.

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4. (TS) Discussion

a. There are various means available to the United States to affect the Israeli nuclear program. Consideration of these means should be paralleled by a careful analysis of the political and military advantages accruing to Israel through their potential of a nuclear capability. The means available to the United States are: (1) economic and arms sanctions; (2) negotiations on a quid pro quo basis; and (c) a denouncement of Israel and cessation of assistance.

b. Conversely, whatever Israel does with regard to development of nuclear weapons, the decision can be used as bargaining leverage against the United States. Israel could, on the one hand, claim that US (and/or other) coercive efforts and threats of arms restrictions necessitate her recourse to nuclear capability. Further, Israel might privately threaten the United States with prosecution of a nuclear program if the United States persists in the four-power approach to a Middle East settlement, claiming that this approach divests her of support and requires maximum effort for the preservation of her national security.

c. It is probably a fair assumption that Israel's initial asking price for giving up a nuclear capability would be a security guarantee by the United States. Such a guarantee would not be in the best interests of the United States.

d. One of the primary problems of the Middle East developed when the Arab-Israeli conflict tended to polarize along an East-West axis. The United States should attempt to depolarize the area, thereby lessening the possibilities of a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Any unilateral agreement which the United States might reach with Israel, which could become public either through error or through deliberate act, would result in the United States appearing to guarantee Israel's nonnuclear status and would intensify this polarization. By extension, this would imply that the United States was at least tacitly guaranteeing Israel's security. Such a concept is inimical to the interests of the United States. It has, unfortunately, already gained a great deal of currency throughout the world, particularly among the Arab States. The United States should avoid any actions or situations which would further propagate this idea. Any move which the United States might make demonstrating US capability to control Israel's nuclear ambition would further categorize Israel as a US-client state and, thereby, imply the US assumption of responsibility for all aspects of future Israeli behavior.

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5. ~~(TS)~~ Possible Courses of Action. With the foregoing reservations in mind, the following alternatives should be considered:

a. Alternative A. Economic sanctions, such as restrictions of export licenses, removal of fundraising organizations from tax exempt status, and controls over Israeli bank deposits, would not produce any immediate significant effect on Israeli economy or military capability. The threat of economic sanctions would be strongly resisted by Israel and would result in considerable domestic political pressure on the administration.

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b. Alternative B. An approach at the highest level could be made in which the United States requests agreement by Israel to desist [redacted]. This approach would no doubt require quid pro quo. The limits of this quid pro quo should be firmly established. In no case should it imply a security guarantee by the United States. This tactic may require some time-phased sanctions such as stoppage of F-4 and A-4 aircraft deliveries to avoid delaying tactics by the Israelis.

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c. Alternative C. The President could confront the Israeli Prime Minister with the facts and state that unless we receive formal agreement that the Israelis will desist [redacted] we will, incident to cancellation of all arms agreements and other arrangements favorable to Israel, make public the facts concerning Israeli determination [redacted].

d. Alternative D. Another alternative is our present course of action which the United States is now following in its exploration of the four-power talk possibilities. This could permit the United States to finesse the question and avoid the confrontation with Israel. If a comprehensive peace settlement could be reached which was satisfactory to Israel, it might overcome her desire to acquire a nuclear capability.

6. ~~(TS)~~ Recommendations. Of the four possible alternatives discussed above, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend Alternative B, which suggests a high-level approach embodying the offer of quid pro quo without a security guarantee by the United States. This embodies the least objectionable reactions. The much stronger approach, contained in Alternative C, which would threaten exposure to world opinion, elimination of present economic favoritism, withholding presently contracted military equipment, and possibly a selective embargo, would be a suitable

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fall-back position. Alternative A is considered to be lacking in shock effect and too time consuming to be appropriate in the present circumstances. If the estimate of probability for success for Alternatives B and C is considered too low, or the political costs too high, we have only Alternative D, continuation of resolution of the problem through four-power talks, as a final alternative. If Alternatives B and C are not considered to present too high a cost to the United States, Alternative B should be undertaken at the Presidential level within the next 6 weeks.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:



EARLE G. WHEELER
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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