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By KJ NARA Date 01/18/06



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ACTION MEMORANDUM

7520622

October 15, 1975

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TO: P - Mr. Sisco

FROM: NEA - Alfred L. Atherton, Jr.  
OES - Myron B. Kratzer

Response to Congressional  
Questions on Israel's Nuclear Capability

The purpose of this memorandum is to clear with you a classified response to three questions regarding Israel's nuclear capabilities (Attachment 1) asked of Assistant Secretary Kratzer by Congressman Steelman at hearings before the House Subcommittee on Energy and Environment of the Committee of Interior and Insular Affairs on July 21.

Our recommended response, at Attachment 2, takes the position that while in our judgment Israel has the technical and scientific capability to produce nuclear weapons, we have no concrete evidence that it has done so. CIA disagrees with this position and has offered instead a USIB assessment (extracted from USIB Memo on Prospects for Further Proliferation, September 1974), at Attachment 3, which takes the position "we believe that Israel already has produced nuclear weapons." We have been told that CIA has used this USIB assessment in briefings on the Hill.

Our objections to CIA's position are:

-- It is an estimate, and Congressman Steelman has asked for "U.S. knowledge" of Israel's nuclear capacity.

-- As an estimate, it puts forward a position which cannot be substantiated by evidence. There is no knowledge, or conclusive evidence, that Israel possesses or is working on a nuclear device, though for some USG purposes--but not this reply to Steelman--it may be prudent to assume the unprovable worst.

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*Per Atherton*  
*no answer*  
*response in writing*  
*no formal reply*  
*not done*  
*no answer*

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-- Our suggested response states what we know.

-- A U.S. statement offering the assessment that Israel is a nuclear weapons country, if made public, would have the effect of fact and thus inspire profoundly negative political repercussions in the Middle East and among our allies.

Recommendation:

That you approve for release at this time our suggested response to Congressman Steelman at Attachment 2.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

Attachments:

1. Congressman Steelman's questions
2. Suggested response
3. CIA's position (USIB assessment)

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1 that in their policies and in their actions they are not  
2 and would not contribute to the acquisition of nuclear  
3 explosives by any other countries.

4 Mr. Steelman. As a last resort, has the department  
5 thought about the prospects of Israel using a nuclear weapon  
6 in the Middle East if all else were failing and it appeared  
7 that the country were falling?

8 Mr. Kratzer. As I said, this is so far from my area of  
9 responsibility that I really can't give you any response. I  
10 am sure that all of these factors are considered by people  
11 whose responsibility lies in that area. I do not have  
12 knowledge that that is a possibility that <sup>we</sup> need to be concerned  
13 about. In other words, I have no knowledge that Israel has  
14 that capability, as I indicated earlier.

15 Mr. Steelman: You mentioned earlier that you would be  
16 happy to furnish the subcommittee with a memo in that regard  
17 and I would ask unanimous consent, Mr. Chairman, that we ask  
18 the Department of State to furnish us with a memo as to current  
19 U.S. knowledge as to whether or not Israel has such a weapon,  
20 current U.S. knowledge as to whether or not they are working  
21 on such a weapon, and current U.S. knowledge with respect to  
22 their access of materials with which such a weapon might be  
23 made.

24 Mr. Kratzer. I will be glad to refer that request to

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ATTACHMENT 2

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Israel's Nuclear Capability

Israel maintains that it is not a nuclear state. Prime Minister Rabin, in the most explicit statement to date on Israel's nuclear capability, said on Danish television last December 17 that "we (Israel) are not a nuclear power, which means that we have no nuclear weapons." He again repeated this basic Israeli position on ABC's Issues and Answers on September 7: "...Israel is a non-nuclear country. We will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the area, and in the case that there would be an overall settlement, that is to say a peace agreement, we will sign every agreement about a nonproliferation treaty."

We judge that Israel has the technical and scientific capability to produce nuclear weapons if it chooses to do this. Israel has the capacity to produce weapons-grade fissionable material from its French-supplied Dimona reactor, although evidence that it has a chemical reprocessing facility to separate the plutonium in usable form is lacking. In short, the United States does not have concrete evidence that Israel possesses nuclear weapons, though we cannot exclude the possibility.

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The United States continues to pursue with Israel, as with other countries, a long-time policy in regard to the provision of nuclear materials and assistance that requires stringent application of safeguards. The United States also continues to call on Israel as on all other nonsignatory countries to join the NPT, a matter which the Israeli Government says it has under study.

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## Prospects for Further Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

1. In the 1980s, the production of nuclear weapons will be within the technological and economic capabilities of many countries. The once formidable barriers to development of nuclear weapons by nations of middling size and resources have steadily diminished over time. They will continue to shrink in the years ahead as plutonium, enriched uranium, and technology become more widely spread. Some countries will consider nuclear weapons largely in terms of military utility. The principal determinant of the extent of nuclear weapons proliferation in coming years will, however, be political considerations—including the policies of the superpowers with regard to proliferation, the policies of suppliers of nuclear materials and technology, and regional ambitions and tensions.

2. As things now stand, it is likely that India will proceed to fabricate weapons covertly. But the US or the USSR still might be able to dissuade them. The Indians probably would begin a weapons program with the intent of keeping it small, but once launched on that course pressures for an overt, substantial program—including nuclear-capable aircraft, missiles or both—are likely to prove irresistible. An Indian decision to proceed with an overt weapons program on any scale will be one factor inclining some other countries to follow suit.

3. We believe that Israel already has produced nuclear weapons. Our judgment is based on Israeli acquisition of large quantities of uranium, partly by clandestine means; the ambiguous nature of Israeli efforts in the field of uranium enrichment; and Israel's large investment in a costly missile system designed to accommodate nuclear warheads. We do not expect the Israelis to provide confirmation of widespread suspicions of their capability, either by nuclear testing or by threats of use, short of a grave threat to the nation's existence. Future emphasis is likely to be on improving weapon designs, manufacturing missiles more capable in terms of distance and accuracy than the existing 260-mile Jericho, and acquiring or perfecting weapons for aircraft delivery.

4. Several other countries—including West Germany, Sweden, Canada and Italy—could have fabricated nuclear devices more easily, from a technological and financial point of view, than India and Israel.

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Sensitive Intelligence Sources and Methods Involved