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**Special National Intelligence Estimate SNIE
100-8-60, 'Implications of the Acquisition by Israel
of a Nuclear Weapons Capability'**

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SPECIAL
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE
NUMBER 100-8-60
IMPLICATIONS OF THE ACQUISITION
BY ISRAEL OF A NUCLEAR
WEAPONS CAPABILITY

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, The Joint Staff, and the Atomic Energy Commission

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

on 8 December 1960. Concurring were The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff; the Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB; the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of his jurisdiction.

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PANEL, E.O. 12958, AS AMENDED, SECTION 5.3(b)(3)

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Nº 366

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

22 December 1980

MEMORANDUM TO HOLDERS OF SNIE 100-8-80, "IMPLICATIONS OF THE ACQUISITION BY ISRAEL OF A NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAPABILITY," dated 8 December 1980



E.O. 12958, as amended
Section 3.3(b)(1)

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

29 December 1960

MEMORANDUM TO HOLDERS OF SNIE 100-8-60, "IMPLICATIONS OF THE ACQUISITION BY ISRAEL OF A NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAPABILITY," dated 8 December 1960

REFERENCE: Memorandum to Holders of SNIE 100-8-60, dated 22 December 1960



E.O. 12958, as amended
Section 3.3(b)(1)

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IMPLICATIONS OF THE ACQUISITION BY ISRAEL OF A NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAPABILITY

THE ESTIMATE

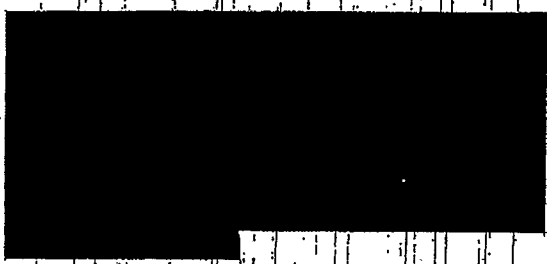
I. ISRAELI CAPABILITIES

1. Recent information confirms that Israel is engaged in construction of a nuclear reactor complex in the Negev, near Beersheva.¹ A number of interpretations of the function of this complex are possible, including research, plutonium production, nuclear electric power generation, or combinations thereof. On the basis of all available evidence, including the configuration of the complex, we believe that plutonium production for weapons is at least one major purpose of this effort. There may be other purposes, e.g., power, but the secrecy surrounding the project and the location of the installation suggests that it is intended for the production of weapons grade plutonium, whether or not generation of electric power is involved.

2. We have extensive evidence that France is supplying plans, materials, equipment, technical assistance and also training Israeli personnel.

The Israelis have obtained about 20 tons of heavy water and possibly other assistance from Norway.

3. We estimate that Israel will produce some weapon-grade plutonium in 1963-1964 and possibly as early as 1962.



II. IMPLICATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

4. *French Motivations.* We have no direct evidence of French motivations for providing nuclear assistance to Israel. However, regardless of whether French planning laid primary emphasis on the military or on the peaceful aspects of the project, their decision was consistent with their policy of bolstering Israel as the only reliable long-term French ally in an area swept by influences hostile to France. France has repeatedly contended that vigorous and, if necessary, unilateral action was necessary to prevent anti-Western nationalist, neutralist, and Communist forces from outflanking NATO in the Near East and North Africa.

5. *Israeli Motives and Intentions.* We do not believe that Israel will embark on the development of nuclear weapons with the aim of actually starting a nuclear war against the UAR or another Arab state. The Israelis would consider that such action would be unlikely to earn them lasting security from the Arab threat, and that except in the most compelling circumstances, the risks and the adverse international reactions would outweigh the advantages. The Israeli Govern-

¹ See Annex for detailed statement on this evidence.

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E.O. 12958, as amended
Section 3.3(b)(1)

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ment would in particular be extremely sensitive about the prospect of severe reactions on the part of both the US and the USSR.²

6. Nevertheless, possession of a nuclear weapon capability, or even the prospect of achieving it, would clearly give Israel a greater sense of security, self-confidence, and assertiveness. Israel would clearly make the most of any such achievement in terms of impressing its Arab enemies—and other Afro-Asian states—with Israel's technological capacities, military potential, and political prestige. In any public announcement concerning their nuclear reactor program, the Israelis would almost certainly stress the peaceful nature of their efforts, but they would, also, as time goes on, make plain that henceforth Israel is a power to be accorded more respect than either its friends or its enemies have hitherto given it.

7. As Israel approached the achievement of a nuclear weapon capability, for example, it probably would make it increasingly clear that an Arab attack on Israel would be met with nuclear retaliation. Israel would emphasize that Arab hopes of solving the Palestine problem by boycott, blockade, and military means were now unrealistic and that the Arabs had no recourse but to negotiate with Israel for a peaceful settlement. At the same time Israel would be less inclined than ever to make concessions and would press its interests in the area more vigorously over such issues as

²The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, believes that as written this paragraph attributes a more passive reaction to the considerations influencing Israeli attitudes than the history of modern Israel will support. He, therefore, believes this paragraph should read as follows:

"We do not believe that Israel will embark on the development of nuclear weapons with the specific aim of actually starting a nuclear war against the UAR or another Arab state unless other weapons systems fail to provide sufficient military power to support Israeli policy. The Israelis would consider that such action would risk adverse international reactions, and the Israeli Government would in particular be extremely sensitive about the prospect of severe reactions on the part of both the US and the USSR."

transit through the Suez Canal and Gulf of Aqaba.

8. *Arab Reaction.* If they do not already know it the Arabs are soon likely to learn of the Israeli nuclear effort, and will almost certainly conclude that at least one major purpose is production of nuclear weapons. Arab popular reaction will be one of consternation. Arab public opinion will tend to blame the US as well as the French for Israeli accomplishments in this field and will condemn the action as a further manifestation of Western imperialist and Zionist designs against the Arabs. NATO will also receive some blame. Of all the Arab governments, that of the UAR will feel by far the most threatened and will be the most concerned. The UAR will probably seize the Arab initiative. It will appeal to the UN and to the US for safeguards and assurances, arguing that the US is in a position to impose its will on France and certainly on Israel if it so chose. However, it is likely to look primarily to the USSR for countervailing military aid and political backing to counter the Israeli threat. As a last desperate resort, the UAR might try to destroy the Israeli program through preventive military action. Given present relative military capabilities, however, Nasser would almost certainly realize that such military action would precipitate a war which he is likely to lose.

9. Under UAR leadership, the Arabs may take concrete sanctions against French and possibly other Western interests in the area.

10. The USSR would almost certainly not provide nuclear weapons to the UAR, nor assistance in developing a capability for the production of fissionable material. In lieu of providing nuclear weapons or assistance, the USSR would almost certainly give general assurances of support to the UAR, threaten reprisals on Israel should it use nuclear weapons, and exploit the issue to the utmost in the UN. In particular, the USSR would accuse the US of complicity with Franco in the nuclear arming of Israel and would cite this as new proof of the colonialist and anti-Arab character of Western policy.

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III. REPERCUSSIONS IN THE FREE WORLD.

11. Public knowledge of French aid to Israel in the nuclear field will come very soon, and will almost certainly be coupled with widespread suspicion that this is for military purposes. This will bring forth a barrage of press and public criticism of the French and the Israelis. The criticism will be the more intense because of the secret nature of the cooperation. Some of the adverse reaction will occur in France itself. Western European official reactions, however, particularly those of the NATO nations, are likely to be somewhat restrained by fear of antagonizing de Gaulle at a critical time in the life of NATO and at a time when he is engaged in a showdown with extreme rightists on the Algerian question. The German Federal Government will be especially circumspect, not wishing to add to its existing differences with de Gaulle and being generally reluctant to condemn Israel.

12. This development will have an important and lasting effect on Western opinion regarding the arms race. Knowledge that Israel is well on the way to becoming a member of the nuclear club is likely to bring greatly increased public pressure in the West for moves to check the spread of nuclear armaments. This pressure is likely to be given strong official support by Canada and some smaller NATO countries as well as by the neutral countries.

13. On the other hand, Israel's initiative will remove some of the inhibitions to development of nuclear weapons in other Free World countries with the resources and the military incentives to achieve such a capability. In particular, the Israeli development will probably lead to more urgent examination of the issue in several countries such as Sweden and Switzerland, both of whose governments have given serious consideration to launching a nuclear weapons program.

14. Disclosure of the Israeli program and of French support for it would also add a new and complicating factor to France's already tangled relations with African nations, many of which have strongly protested against

French nuclear tests in the Sahara. Whatever support some of the African states may have been disposed to give France on the Algerian question, will decline substantially. There is likely to be an angry wave of criticism of France, with the UAR, Ghana, Guinea, and other states taking full advantage of the opportunity to beat the drums for Afro-Asian solidarity. On the other hand, Israel's overall nuclear achievements are likely to enhance its prestige among certain Black African states which are already inclined to look to Israel for technical and economic assistance.

IV. SOVIET BLOC REACTIONS

15. The USSR will vigorously agitate the issue of a prospective Israeli nuclear capability. It will, for example, probably increase pressures on the US and UK for an agreement banning nuclear tests or even adopting broader prohibitions in the nuclear weapons field. The USSR will probably re-emphasize a former appeal for a nuclear free zone in the Middle East, to include Turkey. It will further exploit the matter to build up neutralist and Western support for its current proposals on general and complete disarmament. It is probable that Khrushchev will find a way to employ this question in his quest for a meeting between himself and the incoming US President.

16. Apart from such manipulations, the Soviets will in fact be anxious to head off Israeli acquisition of nuclear weapons. They are opposed to the spread of nuclear weapons. In addition, they recognize that this development will increase pressures from Communist China for Soviet assistance in achieving nuclear capability, and produce demands from the UAR along the same lines. On this account, it is possible that the Soviets would be led to make concessions in their negotiating position on nuclear testing; they would doubtless also calculate that the US and the UK would themselves be under pressure to make concessions. In any event, they will probably make diplomatic approaches to the US designed to generate US pressure upon France and Israel.

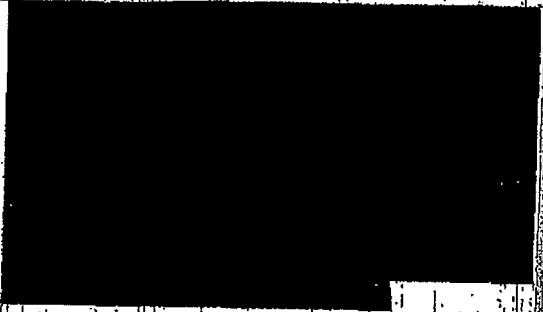
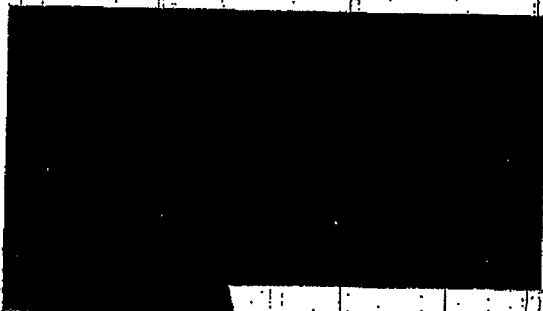
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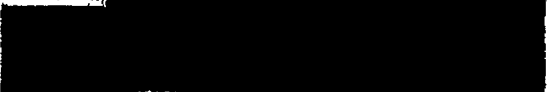
ANNEX

ISRAELI REACTOR SITE NEAR BEERSHEBA

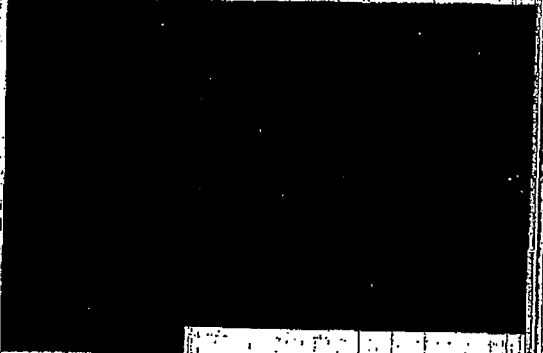
1. Recent information confirms that Israel is engaged in construction of a nuclear reactor complex in the Negev near Beersheba. A number of interpretations of the function of this complex are possible, including research, plutonium production, and/or nuclear electric power generation. Israeli statements and other sources indicate that the Israelis have been building a nuclear power reactor. However, the secrecy surrounding the project suggests that the complex is intended for the production of weapon-grade plutonium, whether or not generation of electric power is involved. Recent statements by Chairman of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission Bergman indicate that a 10-20 MW heavy water research reactor is being constructed.



2. We have extensive evidence that France is supplying plans, materials, equipment, technical assistance and also training Israeli personnel.



The Israelis have obtained about 20 tons of heavy water and possibly other assistance from Norway.



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