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ISRAEL NUCLEAR WEAPONS

THE ISSUES FOR DECISION

I. Would Israeli possession of nuclear weapons be sufficiently detrimental to US interests that it is worth a confrontation to prevent it? Two decisions are possible:

- A. Leave the situation alone on grounds that we cannot stop proliferation and, anyway, the only development that could induce Israel to curb its nuclear weapons program is a peace settlement with the Arabs. Those who hold this view feel we should concentrate on achieving a political settlement and let this issue fall into place behind the settlement.
- B. Make a major effort to keep nuclear weapons from being introduced into the Middle East on grounds that introduction would destroy any chances for a settlement, would sharply increase the chances of nuclear weapons being used in anger and would increase the risk of a US-USSR confrontation.

RECOMMENDATION: That you approve judgment B.

Approve B \_\_\_\_\_ Lean toward A \_\_\_\_\_

II. If we decide that Israel's possession of nuclear weapons is against our interest, what exactly do we want Israel to do? (There is a difference between what we want and what we ask for.) These are the possibilities:

- A. Give up its nuclear option by dismantling any nuclear devices it may have and destroying components. [We think this is unrealistic.]
- B. Freeze their nuclear weapons program where it is. [We do not know exactly what this would mean since we are not sure whether they have weapons now or not.]
- C. Not assemble completed nuclear explosive devices. [The State-Defense paper at Tab B recommends this as our in-house definition of what we want. This may be the best statement of what we would like in terms of our opposition to nuclear proliferation, of what we want on the public record, and of what we should ask for. But it may be illusive. The significant act in terms of international

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consequences is not just the assembly of a nuclear device because that can be kept secret and have no international impact. The significant act is the public revelation of the assembly.]

- D. Not publicize the assembly of completed nuclear explosive devices. [This is what we really want to stop since it may be the only thing, if anything, that we can stop. For purposes of the record, however, we may not want to state our objective this way, not even to ourselves in any formal way.]
- E. Sign the NPT. [This seems an absolute minimum and should be included as our objective beside whichever of the objectives we seek.]

RECOMMENDATION: That we want Israeli signature of the NPT before the end of the year and ratification soon after (E above). That, in addition, it will be our unstated objective to keep Israel's possession of nuclear weapons from becoming public knowledge (D above). That it will be our stated purpose for internal working purposes to stop Israel from assembling completed nuclear explosive devices (C above).

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

III. What do we ask the Israelis to do? Because of the difficulty of enforcing an Israeli agreement to do something they do not want to do and because of the delicacy of the public record on this issue, we need a formula that gets what we want but builds a more defensible record than we would have if we just asked for the minimum we would settle for. The possibilities are:

- A. Ask the Israelis to commit themselves not to become a nuclear power. [This is what we would be asking for in pressing the Israelis to sign the NPT, and we could not expect to get a bilateral commitment that did not have at least as much of an escape clause as the NPT. We would be addressing this issue in the NPT context as a minimum, but we should seek a bilateral assurance that would define more precisely what such a commitment would mean in the light of the advanced state of Israel's nuclear weapons program.]

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- B. Ask the Israelis to freeze their nuclear weapons program where it is. [While this may be generally about what we want the Israelis to do, this formulation is not practical because it is impossible to enforce and because it might make us accomplices in Israel's secret possession of nuclear weapons.]
- C. Ask the Israelis not to "possess" nuclear weapons, defining "possession" to ourselves as the "assembly of a completed nuclear explosive device." [We think this is what we have to ask for and build into our record. This leaves the Israelis to decide for themselves what constitutes "possession" without involving us in that definition. For our own purposes, "possession" means the availability of a device that could be exploded on short notice, but we do not want to get into a debate over how many hours or days short of actual assembly a nation can be without "possessing." The point is that we cannot enforce a precise understanding and therefore should mainly concern ourselves with building a record that will permit us to defend taking our distance from a nuclear Israel if ever Israel's use of those weapons threatens to involve us in nuclear confrontation.]
- D. Ask the Israelis not to publicize their possession of nuclear weapons. [This would make us accomplices in Israel's nuclear program at the same time as we are taking a public stand against proliferation. While this may be our real minimum objective, we would achieve it--and yet still avoid complicity--by pressing for Israeli agreement that it will not "possess" nuclear weapons. What it agrees not to "possess," it cannot announce, test or deploy.]

RECOMMENDATION: That we ask the Israelis to sign the NPT and agree to ratify within a reasonable period (modification of A above). In addition, that we ask the Israelis to reaffirm to us in writing the assurance that Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Mid-East and to specify that "introduction" means "possession of nuclear explosive devices" (C above).

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

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- IV. What is the best tactic to follow in seeking a bilateral assurance from Israel of the kind we want? In the paper at Tab B is a course of action which represents pretty much the consensus of the Review Group. Essentially, this suggests that Richardson and Packard call in Rabin and say that, in connection with Israel's request to advance delivery of the Phantoms to August, this Administration has reviewed the record of the sale and wants to tie up loose ends-- the precise meaning of Israel's commitment not to be the first to "introduce" nuclear weapons--left in the discussions leading to that sale. They would then present our request for Israel's confirmation that possession of nuclear weapons as well as testing and deployment would constitute "introduction" of nuclear weapons into the area (III above) and raise the question of Israeli signature on the NPT. The issue is whether we are prepared to imply-- and to carry out if necessary--the threat not to deliver the Phantoms if Israel does not comply with our request. These are the choices:
- A. A graduated approach--preferred by Sisco--would begin with a demarche to the Israelis making clear our interest that there be no nuclear weapons in the Mid-East but not introducing the threat of withholding the Phantoms until the Israelis had demonstrated their unresponsiveness. Depending on the degree of unresponsiveness, we would then have the option of slowing down or suspending entirely the shipment of conventional weapons, including the Phantoms. [However delicately we handle the question of withholding delivery of the aircraft, we fear this is just a prescription for indecision. There is no point to getting into a confrontation on this subject with the Israelis unless we are prepared to follow through.]
- B. A more direct approach would derive from the need--as Defense and Elliot Richardson see it--to make clear at the outset that we are serious. Those who hold this view believe that Israel would take us seriously only if it were convinced that we would halt the delivery of conventional weapons, especially aircraft. [We think it is necessary to decide now whether we are prepared to suspend delivery of conventional weapons to gain our objective; though we recognize the desirability of minimizing the atmosphere of confrontation.]

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C. A gentle approach based on a hard decision would minimize the atmosphere of confrontation but leave little doubt that we are prepared to withhold conventional weapons to achieve our objective. This is the approach to Rabin described above under IV and in the paper at Tab B. [We think this is the best approach because it leaves to the Israelis the decision on whether to make a confrontation on the issue or to find their own way of meeting our request.]

RECOMMENDATION: That you approve the course described in C above and in the attached paper.

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

V. If we are going to make this approach on nuclear weapons, what should we ask the Israelis to do with the surface-to-surface missiles they have and are manufacturing? There are three choices:

- A. Ask them to dismantle the missiles they have and halt the production line which is turning out its first missiles this summer. [We think this is an unrealistic objective because the Israelis would never agree. There is strong feeling in some quarters of our government, however, that this is essential because the rest of the world will read Israel's production of missiles as tantamount to readying a nuclear delivery capability.]
- B. Ask the Israelis to halt the production line. [The State-Defense paper recommends this course. We doubt it is achievable because Israel has invested a great deal and the missiles are just beginning to roll off the production line. Moreover, our position in defending cutting off arms deliveries on this issue is less favorable than on nuclear weapons because--even though it seems obvious--we cannot prove that missile deployment is necessarily related to a nuclear weapons program.]
- C. Ask the Israelis not to deploy the missiles they have or any other nuclear-capable strategic missile. [This is a minimum. As with the nuclear weapons, the significant act is general public awareness of the weapon, and this would surely follow

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from deployment of these missiles to launching pads. What non-deployment means is that Israel could produce the missiles and then put them in a shed instead of in the launching area. ]

RECOMMENDATION: That we initially ask the Israelis not to deploy missiles and to halt production--but that we be prepared to settle for their agreement not to deploy.

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

VI. If you approve the recommendations above and calling in Rabin to make our approach, the question arises as to who should do the job. The State-Defense paper recommends that Under Secretaries Richardson and Packard do this together to emphasize the political seriousness with which we view the issue and the implication for our continued arms shipments. The joint approach is a good idea. Elliot Richardson has an excellent grasp of this issue and comes down pretty much in line with the above recommendations. However, Secretary Laird is also personally concerned. If the approach to Rabin is made later next week, Richardson, as Acting Secretary, and Laird would make an appropriate combination.

RECOMMENDATION: That you approve a joint approach timed to make the Richardson-Laird combination work.

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

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