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STATE DEPT DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW

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 BO 12954, 25X (2) (6)
 IPS/CR/IR by February 1, 1965

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Memorandum of Conversation

Participants: Mr. Henry A. Kissinger,
 Mr. William N. Dale, Deputy Chief of Mission
 Mr. Stephen E. Palmer, Jr., Chief, POL
 Mr. George B. Lambrakis, POL Officer

Mr. Kissinger has visited the TACC base at Hatzor, details about which are reported separately.

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 NW 49683
 RB 3/1/19

A. Political

1. Outstanding impression that nobody takes U.S. guarantees seriously.

This contrasts with Mr. Kissinger's last visit, in 1962, when Ben-Gurion questioned him at length on U.S. guarantees, making it obvious, Kissinger thought, that Israel then interested in guarantees, but not now.

2. In this connection, Kissinger detected cynicism and disbelief in "tiresome" lectures given by U.S. military on various problems. Israelis had been given extensive lectures and briefings in the U.S., but they still refused to subscribe to U.S. theories, such as (a case in point) the argument that bombers are as effective as missiles for Israel. The Israelis read U.S. military journals and see the U.S. replacing bombers with missiles; how can they believe such arguments?

3. Levavi and Eshkol referred to some sort of USC commitment to GOI that the USC would view Arab water diversion projects with displeasure. Here, again, however, they dismissed any implication that the U.S. would act. Eshkol appeared to "have been well briefed" on capabilities of the U.S. Sixth Fleet, but he pointed out another order would have to be given

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before the fleet's power would come into play, and it could be three days before the fleet could intervene. U.S. inactivity in regard to its guarantees in Cyprus situation (Comment: presumably to Turkey), and the Congo situation were frequently cited as examples.

4. Among developments that Israel would go to war rather than permit, Mr. Kissinger could recollect two that were usually cited: a) Arab diversion of the Jordan water sources, and b) stationing of troops from ^{other} any/major Arab country in Jordan. The military (Rabin, Bar Lev) also stressed that Israel would do its best to prevent the operation of the UAC, since that would build bad habits in the Arab states. However, this factor was not given as a "casus belli," and was not even mentioned by Peres.

5. Following was the degree of reaction of individuals to the question of whether and at what point Israel would act against the water diversion projects. Toughest was Levavi (who said Israel would move ^{as soon as} before the principle of diversion of the waters has become established among the Arab and construction of diversion works begun Governments concerned). Next was Eshkol (who "would not mind fighting", Kissinger felt, and who said bombing of the works was not effective and would not be the method used. Eshkol dwelt on the diversion problem much longer than on other matters/ and apparently felt very deeply about it). Then came Bar Lev and Rabin; then Peres (who was quite moderate, and argued that it would be foolish for Israel to get involved in a fight with conventional weapons now since in a few

years an absolute deterrent, in nuclear form, would become available).

Most moderate was Eban (who, Kissinger thought, would not want to fight at all. Eban said Israel would^{only} fight after it were established that the Arabs were withdrawing more than their just share of the Jordan waters).

6. Kissinger found Eshkol adamant on the Palestine Arab refugees.

Eshkol said he would not permit the return of any Arabs under any conditions, since he did not want to create a Cypriot problem here. Israel would be willing to contribute to the resettlement of the refugees elsewhere. Eshkol also said Israel would not cede any territory: "Land is our dream, and we will not give up our dreams." Eshkol then claimed that Israel only occupies 25% of what was Palestine, implying it should be the one to raise further claims.

7. The Israeli leaders were uniformly impressed by the way in which President Johnson had treated Eshkol during the latter's visit to the U.S. Pares and Eban, in particular, made it clear they had not trusted President Kennedy. The group had also not especially taken to the McNamara part of the visit -- though they had been pleased by the military briefing. They were angry at a scolding recently from McGeorge Bundy.

8. Before Kissinger left, Pares invited him to come back^{on another trip} and said he would show him the IDF's operational plans, as background for articles. Kissinger was unsure about what prompted that suggestion and thought he probably should not accept.

B. NUCLEAR

9. In contrast to the way he ^{was} ranked on the question of a fight in the near future, Peres was ranked by Kissinger as by far and away the strongest champion of nuclear weapons development, as an absolute deterrent. Eban, too, who did not want to fight now, favored the development of nuclear capabilities.

10. Kissinger found a striking difference in the tone with which nuclear weapons were treated by the GOI, compared to 1962. Then they seemed that such weapons were necessary and that they knew how to make them, puzzled and indefinite; now they were very certain. This was also true about the scientists with whom he talked at the Weizmann Institute and in Beersheba. Whereas in the U.S. a major segment of the scientific community was against nuclear weapons, here there was no question even among the scientists about Israel's need to develop them, only calculations as to how close they could come to developing them without being the first to detonate one in the Middle East.

11. Kissinger felt it was considered important that Israel not appear to introduce such weapons to the area. However, even this was not a controlling factor. Scientists argued the need to develop weapons both on the basis (a) that the Egyptians might also develop them and (b) on Israel's inability to depend indefinitely on a superiority in conventional methods of warfare -- she would eventually need nuclear. This led Kissinger to conclude that

nothing short of an ironclad U.S. security guarantee would dissuade Israel from developing nuclear weapons.

12. The Israelis said they did not know if the Egyptians were working weapons on nuclear ~~developments~~, but they thought the Indians were, and they suspected that the Indians and Egyptians had some kind of secret cooperative working arrangements.

13. In reply to some Kissinger arguments about the need for an invulnerable base for nuclear deterrents, and the need to protect ~~the~~ population centers, Peres said Israel would base its deterrent at sea.

14. The argument that the Israelis cannot survive an Arab occupation, and that the Arab Governments know they feel this way, would provide credibility for Israel's use of any nuclear deterrent if possessed.

When asked directly, Kissinger said he had a strong belief that Israel is already embarked on a nuclear weapons construction program.

C. MILITARY

15. Kissinger was shown bases, testing installations and weapons assembly areas. He was shown what was described as a U.S. 106 recoilless rifle which the Israelis said they were disassembling for reproduction; it was a hard job, due to the delicate pieces used in it. They were producing 90 in each series of these. U.S. Sherman tanks were refitted inside and out and armed with 105s. They are making 4-inch mortar s. There is much work on pyrotechnic bombs. A two-stage solid-fuel rocket was being and progress was being made toward a solid propellant fuel, developed outside Tel Aviv, he was told. The Israelis are cooperating with the French on missiles; the Israelis have even told the French some things.

The Israelis expect to have this ready by the time the Egyptians have perfected guidance on their rockets in 5 to 6 years. The Egyptian rockets at present have a CEP from 15 to 20 miles. Kissinger saw many Swiss machines and automated workshops at military industries.

16. Rabin was very impressive. He and Bar Lev outlined Israel's military strategy: to hold on all but one front, and attack on that one.

An Egyptian attack by land would be contained and ^a counter-attack launched. The IDF had practiced and was capable of laying extensive minefields (on the Egyptian front) within the first 24 hours. The troops practiced facing in one direction and attacking in another. The air force was pretty sure it could gain the upper hand even ^y if it was attacked first. It was positive it could win if it attacked first, and that would be what it would endeavor to do. (In this regard, Kissinger had been told by the base commander at Hatzor TACC that 85% of the planes were kept in a state of readiness at all times.) Israel can mobilize 400,000 troops within 48 hours.

D. BIOGRAPHIC

17. Peres was disparaging of most world leaders except DeGaulle. He admired DeGaulle for a policy of strength which had done him no harm in the Arab world. Peres disliked all Germans--especially Shroeder -- but seemed to dislike Strauss and Ehler ^{MOST} least of all. Eshkol felt Erhard is a weakling. All thought ill of Wilson; they believed Healy to be a playboy, liked Crossman best of all the Labor Party people, and did not know Stewart. American leadership did not generally rank high either.