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DATE: April 21, 1964

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SUBJECT: Peres, Eshkol and Meir on Nuclear Weapons in the Near East

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"Do you think the UAR will acquire nuclear weapons, and if it does, what would be Israel's reaction?" This question was put to Deputy Defense Minister Shimon PERES by a member of the visiting National War College Group.

Earlier the same day, April 14, Prime Minister Levi ESHKOL told the Group that Dimona was being built and will be used for peaceful research purposes. He said Dimona's primary function would be to serve as a training laboratory for Israeli scientists who, in view of the country's need for desalinated sea water, had to learn nuclear techniques. Foreign Minister Golda MEIR had told the Group that it would be "awful" if Israel were so sorely pressed that it had to seek nuclear weapons.

There were several hours between the NWC Group's meetings with Eshkol and Meir in Jerusalem and its session with Peres at the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv. From the readiness and precision of Peres' response to the question about the UAR's nuclear capabilities it appeared he had given the matter more than several hours' thought.

Peres outlined four possibilities, all of them based on the assumption that the UAR intends to acquire nuclear weapons.

First, the UAR might have to develop nuclear arms on its own. If so, Israel would not be very worried, for the process would take "some years, maybe ten and much can happen in such a long time."

Second, the UAR might cooperate with other countries to develop nuclear weapons. This seems a more likely

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Page 2, A-818 from Tel Aviv

possibility. Israel is particularly concerned about indications of serious UAR nuclear collaboration with India and Yugoslavia. Such collaboration could appreciably shorten the time required to produce weapons.

Third, some power might give nuclear weapons to the UAR. This is unlikely, for "the Russians as well as the Americans" oppose the proliferation of (independent) nuclear arsenals to the Near East.

Fourth, the Soviets might station some of their own nuclear weapon units in the UAR, retaining control of those units. This possibility is a bit more likely than the third one, but is "not very probable after what happened in Cuba."

In reply to the second part of the question, Peres clearly implied that if the UAR obtained nuclear weapons Israel would too, but he emphasized Israel would not be the first to introduce such weapons into the Near East.

COMMENT: Patently, nth countries do not develop nuclear weapons overnight, in sudden response to the clear acquisition of such weapons by their potential enemies. No doubt Israel will seek to keep its option for nuclear weapons fabrication more on the ready than Israeli intelligence estimates the UAR's option to be. The process of "introduction" to the Near East will, if completed, have taken years; the ultimate responsibility obfuscated in mutual recriminations.

Department pass to other interested posts as appropriate.

FOR THE AMBASSADOR:



Stephen E. Palmer, Jr.
First Secretary of Embassy

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