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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

ESTABLISHMENT OF A NUCLEAR WEAPON-FREE ZONE IN THE REGION OF
THE MIDDLE EAST

Letter dated 27 May 1981 from the Permanent Representative of
Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In his letter dated 3 February 1981 and addressed to Your Excellency (A/36/92), the Permanent Representative of Pakistan claimed, inter alia, that "the nuclear research and development programme of Pakistan is geared entirely to peaceful purposes". He also quoted a CBS news report of 21 February 1980 which "stated that the double flash picked up by a United States monitoring satellite in September 1979 off the coast of South Africa was, in fact, a nuclear explosion carried out by Israel with the help and co-operation of the South African Government".

On instructions, I have the honour to make the following observations:

A. Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme

1. Background

Pakistan is not a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It has not ratified the Partial Test-Ban Treaty of 1963, and its nuclear activities are not completely covered by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.

Although Pakistani officials frequently deny their country's intentions to develop nuclear weapons and maintain that its nuclear activities are designed for peaceful purposes, there is abundant evidence indicating that Pakistan aims at producing nuclear weapons. The Pakistani Atomic Energy

* A/36/50.

Commission, the Ministry of Defence and the Engineering Research Laboratories share responsibility for the country's nuclear activities, and are involved in a process directed at the establishment of a nuclear infrastructure, which, on completion, will make Pakistan self-sufficient in the nuclear field. 1/

In order to obtain weapon-grade material, Pakistan has embarked in parallel on the reprocessing of plutonium and on uranium enrichment. Pakistan is also working on the development of nuclear explosive devices and on preparations for a test nuclear detonation.

2. The weapons programme

(a) Plutonium course

Since 1972, Pakistan has operated a 137MW CANDU (heavy water type) power reactor located at Paradise Point Sind, near Karachi. This reactor - known as KANUPP - is under IAEA safeguards. KANUPP is well-suited for the production of weapons-usable plutonium since it can be loaded and unloaded on line. During its eight years of operation, KANUPP has produced spent fuel containing more than 100 kg of plutonium. A chemical facility is required to obtain plutonium. Pakistan obtains plutonium from the irradiated fuel produced in this nuclear power plant through reprocessing activities carried out at a hot laboratories complex located close to the Nuclear Research Centre at PINSTECH (the Pakistan Institute of Technology), near Islamabad. 2/ This facility has functioned clandestinely since 1980, 3/ and produces annually at least 20 lb of plutonium necessary for one explosive device a year. 4/ Thus it is possible that this reprocessing facility will provide Pakistan with the necessary quantity of plutonium for one explosive device by the middle of 1981.

In addition - after obtaining most blueprints of a French reprocessing plant and clandestinely purchasing components from a variety of countries - Pakistan has begun constructing at the Chasma Nuclear Centre a large reprocessing plant (KNC2), to be completed in 1982-1983. This plant will enable Pakistan to produce plutonium for at least 10 nuclear explosive devices a year. In other words, it will enable Pakistan to build a meaningful arsenal of nuclear weapons. 5/

(b) Enriched uranium course

Pakistan is secretly constructing (near Kahuta, 20 km from Islamabad) a plant for the production of weapon-grade enriched uranium by centrifuges. This plant is built on the basis of information concerning uranium enrichment technology stolen from the URENCO plant in the Netherlands by a leading Pakistani scientist, Dr. A. Q. Khan. 6/ Pakistan has established a chain of "front" companies throughout 14 countries to acquire clandestinely all the necessary components piece by piece. 7/

Pakistan apparently intends to build the plant in phases:

- (i) A pilot plant which, already in 1979, was reported to have been working. 8/
 - (ii) The assembling of about 1,000 centrifuges which are expected to produce enough enriched uranium for one nuclear explosive device every two years. This phase is in the process of being completed. 9/
 - (iii) The assembling of close to 10,000 centrifuges which in turn could produce about 150 kg of enriched uranium a year, sufficient to make about seven nuclear explosive devices a year. 10/
- (c) Development of the first nuclear explosive device

Pakistan is making preparations related to the development of an explosive device and its testing. For this purpose, it is apparently acquiring overseas the necessary items and equipment and is preparing a detonation site in the desert. 11/

The first Pakistani nuclear explosive device will probably be a plutonium one produced at the hot laboratories of PINSTECH. The decision as to whether and when the first nuclear device is tested will apparently be influenced by various political considerations facing the country's leadership.

3. Other activities in the nuclear fuel cycle

Pakistan is also actively seeking to achieve self-sufficiency in other fields of the fuel cycle.

(a) Uranium mining and purchasing

Pakistan mines, mills and processes uranium ores at the Dera Gazi Khan mines in the central region of the country. 12/ Several hundred tons of uranium are being purchased from Niger, either directly or through Libya. 13/

(b) Fuel fabrication plant

Pakistan has built at Chasma a plant to manufacture fuel elements, apparently using indigenous uranium. 14/

4. Foreign assistance and financial support

There are reports that Libya and Saudi Arabia have provided extensive financial assistance to Pakistan. 15/ Saudi Arabia, which expressed admiration for the Pakistani achievements in the nuclear field, 16/ tried to influence Pakistan to curtail Iraqi financial support in return for sharing Pakistani know-how. 17/

B. The event off the coast of South Africa

On 1 October 1980, the Environment Measurements Laboratory of the US Department of Energy published in its Environmental Quarterly (1 June through 1 September 1980) the following statement in regard to the "Suspected Atmospheric Test in the South African Area":

"The U.S. Vela satellite was reported to have detected an atmospheric nuclear explosion somewhere between South Africa and Antarctica on 22 September 1979. However, no fresh fission products were subsequently reported to be present in the Southern Hemisphere. Our routine results showed no increase in levels. September and October air filters from Christchurch, Hokitika, Wellington, and Auckland, representing particulates from 40,000 m³ of air, were then combined together with the Hokitika October resin (containing the concentrated fallout from the station with highest rainfall for the month). This composite sample was given a long measurement on the high resolution gamma spectrometer. No traces of fresh fission products were detected. Extra extractions of selected resin samples for barium-140 and measurements of strontium-89 also failed to indicate any traces of these short-lived radionuclides."

At a press conference with the Prime Minister of Israel, at the Annual Luncheon of the Foreign Press Association in Jerusalem on 24 February 1981, Mr. Begin rejected newspaper reports concerning the event, saying that "we have nothing in common with it".

C. Israel's position on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East

At the thirty-fifth General Assembly of the United Nations, Israel submitted a draft resolution (A/C.1/35/L.8), calling for the convening of a conference of all States in the Middle East to negotiate the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region. Delegates representing a broad geographical spectrum expressed encouragement and praise for what they termed "a constructive contribution" by Israel in this critical area.

In addition, Israel participated in the consensus on the annual resolution in favour of "The Establishment of a Nuclear-weapon-free-zone in the Middle East" (resolution 35/147). On 12 December 1980, the Representative of Israel made the following explanation of vote when the resolution was adopted by the General Assembly:

"Israel went along with the consensus expressed by the General Assembly in support of the draft resolution contained in document A/35/690 because, like so many Member States, Israel holds that there is an urgent need to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Israel has joined the consensus despite our serious reservations as to the modalities of arriving at the establishment of such a zone as recommended by the resolution before us.

"The introduction of nuclear weapons in the region can be effectively prevented only by means of contractual assurances freely arrived at, and not by obligations imposed from without. Israel has for the last five years not only supported the idea of establishing such a zone, but on numerous occasions - in plenary meetings and in the First Committee, as well as in letters to the Secretary-General - offered proposals to that end.

"It is essential that a nuclear-weapon-free zone be established in a manner most likely to assure each State in the region of the others' compliance with the terms of a freely negotiated convention on the model of the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

"Israel has therefore proposed the conclusion through direct negotiations by all States of the region of a multilateral convention establishing a nuclear-weapon-free-zone in the Middle East" (A/35/PV.94, pp. 33 and 34).

In his press conference of 24 February 1981, Prime Minister Menachem Begin stated that "Israel will not be the first (party) in the Middle East to introduce nuclear weapons. We have stated it (before), and we shall stand by it."

References to the sources on which these observations are based are set out in the attached annex.

I have the honour to request that this letter be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under items 33 and 46 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Yehuda Z. BLUM
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations

Annex

Sources

1. Energy Daily, Washington, 30 September 1980, p. 4; Nucleonics Week, N.Y., 4 December 1980, p. 10.
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5. Liberation, Paris, 17 June 1980; The Globe and Mail, Toronto, 19-21 June 1980.
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7. 8 Days, London, 23 June 1979, pp. 9-10.
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9. International Defence Review, Geneva, 1980, No. 2, p. 203.
10. 8 Days, 23 June 1979, p. 11.
11. Daily Telegraph, London, 3 July 1979, p. 5; International Herald Tribune, Paris, 18 August 1979, p. 5; The Guardian, London, 17 June 1980; Energy Daily, 30 September 1980, p. 4.
12. The Hindu, Madras, India, 4 September 1980, p. 8.
13. Nuclear Fuel, New Jersey, 10 December 1979, pp. 3-4; Financial Times, 4 January 1980; Nuclear Engineering International, Sutton, England, February 1980, p. 11.
14. International Herald Tribune, 2 September 1980; Financial Times, 1 September 1980; Washington Post, 24 September 1980; Nuclear Engineering International, October 1980.
15. The Globe and Mail, 19-21 June 1980; Sunday Times, London, 18 January 1981.
16. Al-Medina, Saudi Arabia, 14 December 1980.
17. Sunday Times, London, 18 January 1981.