

# Washington Star

WASHINGTON, D.C., SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 1978

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## CIA's Top-Secret 'Mistake' on Israel and

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A top-secret CIA document contending that Israel produced nuclear weapons as early as 1974 was made public by the agency itself as a result of a bureaucratic foulup.

The agency is not saying how the error occurred, limiting itself to an acknowledgement by press spokesmen Herbert E. Helu that the document's release was a "mistake."

But one story making the rounds of congressional committees and nu-

clear related agencies is that the CIA, asked by another agency whether any part of the five-page classified document could be made public, intended to release just two paragraphs and keep the rest secret. Instead, the story goes, it released all except the two paragraphs.

"This thing could raise hell with the Middle East negotiations," one senator who asked not to be named said. "If the Israelis have weapons the other side will want to even it up."

THE ERROR COULD further com-

plicate difficult negotiations the United States has been having with close allies who are moving into areas in peaceful nuclear programs where they also deal with bomb-grade nuclear materials, such as highly enriched uranium and plutonium.

For example the document states that some U.S. intelligence officers felt that "Japan's leaders will conclude that they must have nuclear weapons if they are to achieve their national objectives in the developing Asian power balance."

The document also warned that Taiwan, Argentina, and South Africa may also have A-bombs soon.

Furthermore, the document states that Israel obtained some of its uranium "by clandestine means." "We don't know how it happened. We're in the midst of trying to figure that part out," said Helu, who added that "since some of the information in the document should have remained classified, we have no further comment to make."

The document, which had been previously stamped "Secret, No Foreign Disclosure," is entitled "Prospects for Further Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons." It is a summary of a top-secret special intelligence report made by the CIA, after the Indian A-bomb explosion in 1974, that circulated among some top government officials, including commissioners of the now-defunct Atomic Energy Commission.

LAST OCTOBER the Department of Energy found a copy of the CIA summary in files that had been requested under the Freedom of Infor-

the Bomb

nation Act by S. Jacob Scherr, an attorney for an environmental group, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.

Because the document was classified, DOE sent it to the CIA, asking that it make the decision whether any parts of the summary could be made public under the Freedom of Information Act.

The document was reportedly scrutinized by several different branches within the CIA before the

See CIA, A-4  
deletion of two paragraphs and release of the rest.

Helm said the agency does not know whether the reverse was supposed to happen.

The public disclosure of CIA's appraisal on other nations' nuclear intentions comes at a time when the United States is working to keep the lid on the spread of nuclear weapons.

State Department officials have been trying to persuade Japan to forego an ambitious nuclear power program based on plutonium. U.S. diplomats have also been unsuccessfully trying to convince Israel to allow international inspectors into a so-called peaceful nuclear research reactor, which produces plutonium.

A spokesman for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said that the panel was investigating the CIA's "mistake." "That's what we're here for," said an aide.

**A SPOKESMAN FOR** one of the successors of the old AEC, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which has the responsibility for developing safeguards over U.S. nuclear materials here and abroad, said that agency officials were trying to figure out why Joseph Hendrie, the NRC's chairman, and Clifford Smith, director of its office of nuclear materials safety and safeguards, had never received copies of the analysis. "Maybe there was a glitch in the system," said the NRC spokesman. The document may also focus more interest on reports that 206

pounds of highly enriched uranium, which was unexplainably "lost" at a private nuclear fuel fabrication facility at Apollo, Pa., in the mid-1960s, may have been secretly diverted to Israel.

Two weeks ago investigators from three congressional committees looking into the Apollo case interviewed former CIA chief Richard Helms, who was head of the agency when its operatives investigated the Apollo matter and, reportedly, developed a strong opinion that the material had gone to Israel.

Investigators had hoped that Helms might be able to shed some light on reports that President Lyndon B. Johnson may have prevented a more thorough investigation of the Apollo matter because of its embarrassing implications. According to several participants at the briefing, however, Helms' memory was "hazy" on that point and on several other specifics of the Apollo case.

**CURIOSLY,** Thursday's "mistake" was not the first time CIA officials have forgotten that CIA estimates of Israel's nuclear weapons capability are supposed to be secret. In early 1976, the CIA's third-ranking official, Carl Duckett, told a meeting of aerospace executives that Israel had "10 to 20" atom bombs. When the remark later appeared in print, then CIA director George Bush apologized for it, asserting that the statement should never have been made.

Bush, however, did not deny the accuracy of the statement. Shortly after the incident, Duckett retired from the CIA, citing health reasons.