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NSC BRIEFING

Approved For Release 2002/07/02 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000700020002-6

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7 February 1956

BANAT YACOV

- I. Next foreseeable crisis date in Arab-Israeli situation comes on 1 March, the "deadline" date which Israelis gave Amb. Johnston last autumn for gaining Arab acceptance of Jordan river valley scheme.
  - A. After 1 March, Israelis told Johnston, they would feel free to go ahead with unilateral Israeli plan for using Jordan waters.
  
- II. Bone of contention is so-called Banat Yacov project, which takes its name from bridge crossing Jordan River some 8 mi. north of Lake Tiberias (Sea of Galilee).
  - A. Israel wishes to complete canal on western side of Jordan River, running southward from Banat Yacov to Lake Tiberias.
  - B. Objective is stated to be only electric power--diverted water would drop about 800 feet to power-station near Tiberias shore, then flow back into lake.
  - C. Problem--first 1 1/2 mi. of canal must pass through "demilitarized zone" established under the Israeli-Syrian armistice agreement.
    - 1. Syrians maintain (with partial support from UN truce observers) that Israeli project would violate armistice agreement, take water away from Arab landowners in Syria and Jordan.



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2. Israelis maintain (also with partial support of UN truce people) they are within legal rights.
- III. Question came to UN Security Council shortly after Israelis began work on project over two years ago. (Sep '53).
- A. In Oct. '53, Security Council passed resolution asking Israel to suspend work on Banat Yacov project while Council considered problem.
  - B. Subsequently, SC resolution--proposing that matter be referred to UN Truce Supervisor--was vetoed by USSR.
  - C. No formal action since then: accordingly, SC is still in theory seized with problem, and Israelis have, up to present, held off on work within actual "demilitarized zone" while continuing work on seven-mile stretch within their own territory.
- IV. However, Israelis have made their "postponement" of Banat Yacov completion contingent on implementation of Johnston plan.
- A. Since fall of '53, (when Amb. Johnston made first visit to Middle East) negotiations on Jordan valley scheme have moved slowly.
  - B. In fall of '55, Johnston succeeded in obtaining Arab concurrence in technical aspects--already accepted by Israel: Arabs have balked, however, on political grounds.
    1. Although Egyptian prime minister Nasr stated last fall he thought he could bring other Arab

states around to acceptance in three or four months, no sign of such activity on his part to date.

- C. Israeli raid across Tiberias (Dec '55) seems to have killed whatever faint prospect there may have been that Syria or other Arabs would accept Johnston plan in near future.
- D. Thus 1 March deadline approaching with little or no chance of Arab acceptance Jordan valley scheme.
- V. On 31 Jan, Syrian prime minister Ghazzi delivered aide would memoire to US embassy which implied that Syria use force to prevent Israelis from resuming work on that part of Banat Yacov canal which lies in "demilitarized zone."
- A.  Syrian demarche was coordinated with Egypt.
- B. Egyptian prime minister Nasr has stated he will support Syria militarily if hostilities break out over Jordan water issue.
- C. Egypt and Syria have formal military pact, and recent Egyptian troop movements (massing armor in eastern Sinai peninsula) suggest Egypt may be preparing for worst, in expectation it may be called on to fulfill commitment to Syria over water issue.
- VI. However, Israelis have given intimations recently that "deadline" does not necessarily mean they will resume Banat Yacov work on or immediately after 1 March.

- A. Seems more likely that Israelis would first call for review of problem by UN truce supervisor (Gen. Burns) --and implicitly by US, UK and France, the "guarantors" of peace in the area.
- B. Israelis nevertheless probably will not wait too much longer to get issue resolved.
- C. If they cannot do it by diplomacy, they might take chance that Syrians are bluffing, and go ahead anyway.

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UN SEC. GEN OPINION ON BANAT YACOV

BACKGROUND

UN Sec. Gen Hammarskjold after visit to Palestine end January told American officials he felt Banat Yacov issue Syria would fight on. He felt Israel wrong if forced this issue and he and Gen. Burns agreed they would take strong stand against unilateral action by Israel at Banat Yacov.

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