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ISRAEL SCENE

HAIFA — The accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant near Harrisburg, Pa, may have an effect on Israel's plans for construction of its own nuclear plants.

Without going into the argument whether the Harrisburg crisis was exaggerated far out of proportion or not, there is no doubt that the event there has been seized upon, on the one hand by many who are genuinely concerned by the threat to domestic security and by the dangers to environment, and also by many who are playing the Soviet game—anything to cripple America's power potential, and this at a time when it is vitally necessary to free the US from dependence on Arab oil.

For Israel the situation is even more critical for obvious reasons. This country's plans for development of nuclear power have been on an "on-again" "off-again" basis for many years.

In 1964 Levi Eshkol and President Johnson reached agreement on a joint American - Israel nuclear plant, 200 megawatt size. Target date for its operation was 1972. The big hurdle was the financing of the \$200M cost. And when the US did not come through with a grant and favourable loan the plan was dropped.

Israel made the best of the situation by consoling itself that it would be better to wait until the big powers, spending millions on research, would produce a better plant.

By 1970 Israel decided that it would need 400 megawatt plants, twice the size originally contemplated. Three such plants were to be put up in a 15-year period, the first one to begin operations in 1978. The problem of where to site such plants, in addition to the costs, again delayed implementation.

In the meantime Israel had its experts, in consultation with the Westinghouse company, draw up all the technical details for a nuclear power plant, and in 1974 President Nixon promised to approve the sale of an American plant. The then Minister of Commerce and Industry, Haim Bar-Lev, declared that by 1980 all

Israel and nuclear power

by Carl Alpert

new power stations to be built in Israel would be nuclear.

In 1976 the Knesset was told that two plants were being planned, each of 900 megawatt capacity. The first, in the Negev, was to be ready by 1985. The cost of the two: 2 billion dollars.

The years have gone by and nothing has gone beyond the planning. The need for Israel to free itself from dependence on Arab oil is more urgent today than ever before.

Perhaps the time has come to revive an idea projected by Prof Shimon Yiftach, of the Technion, soon after Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem. Yiftach, who is

also president of the Israel Society for Nuclear Engineering, proposed construction of a major power plant to be located on the Sinai coast and operated jointly by Egypt and Israel. The power produced would serve the needs of both countries.

From a political point of view the joint operation would serve to consolidate the trend towards normality in the relationship between the two countries. The location would be remote from any inhabited areas, thus reducing dangers to a minimum. And both countries would benefit enormously.

As matters stand at present, both Egypt and Israel have long-standing requests with the American Government for permission to purchase an American plant, as well as for generous American help in the acquisition. Support of the joint project would be in full consonance with the American policy of promoting the Israel-Egypt detente.

There are only two alternatives for Israel. One is to strike out on its own, and design and build its own plant. Technological development in Israel is such that this would be possible, but the problem of where to locate such a plant would remain, not to speak of financing.

The other alternative is to continue to procrastinate and to continue to base our whole industrial, agricultural and defence complex on an oil economy, with all its obvious risks.