

IPS EDITORIAL

ANOTHER WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

Oct. 9 (IPS)-- A major international press build-up "warning of," "cautioning against," or "ruling out" a new war in the Middle East suggests that we are in fact being prepared for just such an eventuality. The barrage started with Secretary of Defense Schlesinger's statement Sept. 25 that "the United States is not contemplating military action against the oil-producing countries in the Middle East," and it has not let up since. The latest items are the prediction of a new war by the PLO leader Yasser Arafat in an interview with the West German magazine der Spiegel and the report of an Israeli nuclear threat against the Arab countries in Joseph Alsop's Oct. 7 column syndicated in the Washington Post.

There can be no doubt that setting off a new Arab-Israeli military confrontation is among the immediate options the Rockefeller interests could exercise at any time. However, knowing this is not enough. We must be absolutely clear about the specific military options delimited by today's military balance which is entirely different than a year ago. At this point, Israel could not afford to fight the same type of conventional war as in October 1973 and still expect to win. Improved Egyptian and Syrian air defenses and greatly strengthened anti-tank capabilities virtually rule out such a possibility. The tactical possibility of adding significant infantry and artillery support to tank units to defend against hand-carried (small missile) anti-tank weapons is not open to Israel forces on a major scale because of severe Israeli manpower limitations. This actually was conceded indirectly by Israel Foreign Minister Yigal Allon in an interview at the United Nations last Friday. Allon said that if attacked by an Arab state, Israel would not allow the other side to determine "the type of war" to be fought but would strike back at once with all its military might. He added that Israel will not permit herself to be drawn into a war of attrition.

On the basis of these considerations, essentially three different kinds of military courses of action -- simultaneously defining three different types of political options for the Rockefeller forces -- are open to the Israelis. All three are undoubtedly already on the drawing board of NATO strategists and must be regarded not merely as remote future contingencies but as real options now.

First, Israeli forces could make an incursion into Lebanon "in pursuit of " Palestine guerillas. Politically , this would be a "Cyprus-type" of operation, adding to the chaos and confusion in the area. It could be intended, for example, to set the stage for an Iranian move against Iraq. Militarily, it would be a "safe" move for the Israelis since it would not involve Syria or Egypt.

Second, Israel -- in line with Allon's comments (no restriction on "type of war") -- could launch a massive missile attack against an Arab oil field (Iraqi or Syrian), most likely one of secondary significance. Politically, such a move would have obvious consequences in the context of the Rockefeller oil hoax strategy, causing immediately most severe shortages in Western Europe and Japan. Militarily, it would in all likelihood bring about Egyptian and Syrian intervention. Israel could then attempt to avert disaster by launching a pre-emptive massive air-strike to knock out Egyptian and Syrian air power. This, however, might well prove insufficient.

We must therefore be alert to a third possibility -- not to predict it, but to warn firmly that it is a real option -- which, if implemented, must not cause shock or confusion. Third, then, -- in line with Allon's notion of "attack with all the new might" -- Israel might launch one or two nuclear warheads against an Egyptian or Syrian city (the possibility indicated by Alsop).

The international political effects of such an attack need not be detailed here. It should, however, be pointed out that even since January 1974 the international political and strategic situation has changed fundamentally. No longer does there exist the relatively stable political context in Western Europe once defined by the Brandt and Pompidou regimes. A nuclear move on the part of Israel would cause the most massive chaos imaginable. The only possible defense on the part of the Soviet Union against this Rockefeller strategic option would be a "doomsday machine" response, difinitively committing its nuclear might in case of an attack on Iraq, in particular.

By means of a "limited" nuclear attack by Israel against Iraq, Syria, or Egypt, James R. Schlesinger actually could check out the Soviet Union's susceptibility to the notion of "limited" nuclear warfare and then follow up an Israeli nuclear attack with a round of negotiations with the Soviet Union precisely with the purpose of achieving the "conceptual breakthrough" -- forcing the Soviet Union to

accept the distinction between tactical and strategic nuclear arms and warfare -- which Kissinger and Schlesinger were not able to attain in Moscow earlier this year. Or, as Schlesinger put it in January: if, for example, the U.S. launched a tactical nuclear warhead against the Soviet Union's oil field in the Balkans, this should not automatically have to lead to strategic nuclear war!

While the threat of the use of nuclear weapons in the Middle East is thus becoming real, the Soviet leadership since Saturday abruptly has suspended all attacks against the Rockefeller family and their political allies. This development coincides with the arrivals of Polish party chief Gierak in the U.S. and Brezhnev in East Berlin on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the statehood of East Germany. It is also evidenced by the fact that the Daily World (newspaper of the Communist Party U.S.A.) since Saturday has omitted altogether any mention of the Rockefeller name. Presumably the suspension of attacks against Rockefeller is a "shrewd" move on the part of the Soviet leadership to create an agreeable climate in anticipation of the planned Kissinger visit to Moscow this coming weekend. Such peasants' "shrewdness" amounts to nothing less than betrayal of the struggle of the European working class and obviously will not deter the Rockefeller forces from carrying through their international policies.