



The Dangers of the Israeli Nuclear Arsenal



Prof. Dr. Walid 'Abd al-Hay

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Introduction

In 1986, Israel’s nuclear ambiguity strategy collapsed when Mordechai Vanunu, an Israeli nuclear technician of Moroccan origin who worked at Israel’s nuclear reactor in Dimona, revealed, to *The Sunday Times*, Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons documenting his claims with pictures and data. Then, media and intelligence reports continued to tackle Israel’s nuclear capabilities with experts estimating its possession of 80 to 400 nuclear warheads,² not to mention its biological and chemical weapons capabilities.³

Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres talked in one of his books about the quest to build the Dimona reactor, with details reinforcing all international reports on Israel’s nuclear armament.⁴ In addition, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert acknowledged Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons, although some considered this a “slip of the tongue.”⁵



Ehud Olmert



Shimon Peres

This means that the world, especially the global powers, deal with Israel, as a nuclear state, without questioning the legality of its nuclear weapons. This contrary to the case with Iran and North Korea, or India and Pakistan that have restrictions and blockades imposed on them to prevent them from acquiring such weapons, and who are under continuous pressure for fear of leakage of nuclear expertise and materials to other countries or “terrorist groups.”⁶ This is added to Israel’s explicit opposition to any US-Iran agreement on the Iranian nuclear program.

Israel has received direct Western support, especially from France in the beginning,⁷ and it has taken advantage of Western silence, since 1954, on successive international reports concerning its activities in the military nuclear field. This is despite the fact that these reports reveal operations carried out by Israeli forces and leaders including smuggling, espionage, transporting radioactive materials and conducting nuclear tests,



especially in South Africa during the apartheid regime, without Israel being subjected to any punitive measures from any country in the world.⁸

It seems that Israel is not reassured in the long run by its international alliances, as it believes that a change in the stances of its allies is possible under certain international conditions; accordingly, its possession of nuclear weapons makes it more able to be freed from the pressures of allies in unfavorable international situations. Assuming that every country in the world has adopted the same Israeli strategy, the model of the “Unit Veto System” formulated by Morton Kaplan will be achieved.⁹ Kaplan’s theory is strengthened in the literature of international relations, as Richard Falk and Stanley Hoffmann believe that peace can be achieved based on the principle of equality of nations: either everyone possesses nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons are removed from everyone,¹⁰ two suggestions that Israel does not accept.

The rest of the Middle East countries are divided into three groups: countries that have a declared nuclear program (Iran); countries that have capabilities but do not have a nuclear program (most of the major Arab countries and Turkey); and countries that are not qualified for that program. Thus, Israel is unique in the sense that it monopolizes the possession of nuclear weapons but enjoys a Western diplomatic cover while the Western focus is on the Iranian program although Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei issued in 2003, a religious edict (fatwa) which stipulates as “haram” (forbidden) to manufacture weapons of mass destruction, whether nuclear, chemical or biological.¹¹



Ali Khamenei

The Dangers of the Israeli Nuclear Arsenal

The Israeli nuclear program entails several risks, locally in Palestine, regionally especially in the Arab neighboring countries, and internationally. However, these risks have received only little Western media coverage compared to the focus of this media on the Iranian nuclear program. A Western study that analyzes the contents of news and editorials of six Western monthly newspapers in four selected periods, between 2009 and 2012, revealed that they addressed the Iranian nuclear program at an average of 1,232 articles.¹² Another study of eleven Western media outlets, both audio and written, revealed that, over a similar period of time, the Israeli nuclear program was addressed



only 20 times in 1998, 2002 and 2003. This means that covering the Iranian nuclear program is 62 times the coverage of the Israeli program.¹³



The above requires Arab researchers to focus on the dangers of the Israeli nuclear program to balance the view regarding the two projects, especially in the following aspects:

First: Environmental Risks Due to Burying the Nuclear Waste of the Israeli Nuclear Reactors

Waste from nuclear projects is a source of environmental danger to living organisms. Israel buries nuclear waste in three main areas: the West Bank, Negev and the Syrian Golan Heights,¹⁴ in addition to secret burials or burials through corruption channels in countries outside the region.



The most prominent impact of this burial is the emergence of phenomena such as the increase in cancer among the residents of the Palestinian and Jordanian areas adjacent to the areas of Israeli nuclear activity and the places where its waste is buried, which affects the soil, water, air and wildlife in general. It is not a coincidence that cancer rate in the areas adjacent to Israeli nuclear activities is higher than that in the rest of the entire region, noting that the distance between the Dimona reactor and the Hebron governorate in the West Bank does not exceed 40 kilometers. According to the Israeli Ministry of Environmental Protection, its production of hazardous waste is about 317 thousand tons annually, of which only 40% is treated by recycling, while the Ministry refuses to specify ways of treating the remaining 60% of waste, or where it is buried.¹⁵



Research reports indicate that Israel is producing plutonium at the Dimona facility, which is the most radiological substance known in nature. In addition to direct radioactivity of waste, the clothing of personnel who come into contact with radioactive material is also contaminated. The danger is that the Israeli burial sites may worsen the situation in the event of an earthquake in the area which will lead to the exposure of these sites.¹⁶

There have been numerous reports asserting that some Arab countries have accepted the burial of Israeli nuclear waste in their territories, which has created tension within the societies of these countries and caused concern in neighboring countries. A clear example in this respect is what happened in Mauritania in 1998.¹⁷

The risks of pollution have to do with accidents during the operation of reactors, isotope conversion or radiation leakage, which is what happened in a number of countries, including Israel where a violation of safety rules during repair occurred in 1990 during the processing of Cobalt 60 as confirmed 1993 report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).¹⁸ IAEA recorded 3,928 nuclear incidents throughout 1993–2021, which is an average of more than 140 annual accidents.¹⁹



Second: Political Destabilization of the Countries in which Israeli Waste is Buried

Israel is among only four countries in the world that have not signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) with the other countries being India, Pakistan and Cuba. This means it is a “rogue” state against international law due to its non-compliance with international legal rules in this field, as it does not allow IAEA to perform any inspection in Israel, which made it able to expand its nuclear activities as shown by the satellite image of the Negev in the past three years. Also, according to reports of the Arms Control Association, Israel is “may want to produce more tritium, a relatively faster-decaying radioactive byproduct used to boost the explosive yield of some nuclear warheads. It also could want fresh plutonium “to replace or extend the life of warheads already in the Israeli nuclear arsenal.”²⁰ It is noted in this regard that the global powers do not show any objection to the Israeli nuclear program, which is evident in the following:

- 1. The tacit acceptance of Israel’s strategy of monopolizing nuclear weapons in the Middle East. The Israeli policy in acquiring nuclear weapons has resulted in fears



that countries in the Middle East will acquire this weapon, which means strengthening the trends of the regional nuclear arms race, thus constituting an unequivocal threat to regional and international political stability. Arab, international and Israeli reactions toward Iran's nuclear program indicate a repetition of a scene triggered by Israel in the 1960s against what it claimed was an Egyptian nuclear program. Then, in 1981, it struck the Iraqi nuclear reactor, and accused Libya and Algeria of having nuclear projects, not to mention provoking doubts about the so-called network of the Pakistani scientist 'Abdul Qadeer Khan and its nuclear proliferation, in addition to its pursuit and assassination of Iranian and Arab scientists related to nuclear programs or nuclear knowledge, with tacit support from or secret coordination with Western countries, especially the US.²¹



'Abdul Qadeer Khan

Israel refuses the notion of a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and does not allow the IAEA to inspect any of its facilities, while all field evidence and various documents indicate that it possesses all internationally prohibited weapons of mass destruction; nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. It did not sign any international agreements, especially the 1972 Convention on Biological Weapons.²² According to international reports, Israel even worked on developing low-power tactical nuclear weapons and equipped artillery battalions with nuclear missiles for 155-mm Howitzer, and perhaps 203-mm guns, and planted nuclear land mines in the Golan Heights.²³ Furthermore, it is among the last of settler colonies, and it is among most inclined to secret diplomacy and spying even on its most reliable allies. Israel is one of the most condemned countries at the United Nations (UN) bodies, and it is, globally, among the most important money laundering hubs. Yet, despite all this, it was not subjected to any kind of sanctions, to the extent that the US adopted law in 1997, called the Kyl-Bingaman Amendment, which "prohibited US companies from publishing satellite imagery at a resolution that is 'no more detailed or precise than satellite imagery of Israel that is available from commercial sources,' " and this remained in effect until 2020.²⁴



- 2. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has recently confirmed that Israel has developed the Jericho III missiles, which would be able to target all of Iran, Pakistan, and all of Russia west of the Urals—including, for the first time, Moscow. This makes the Israeli threat transcend the Arab region,²⁵ thus expanding the circle of international instability.



Third: Contributing to Nuclear Proliferation

The contemporary history of the spread of nuclear weapons indicates that Israel is the first country outside the global powers to possess nuclear weapons. Israel preceded India in the nuclear field by eight years and North Korea by 40 years as evident in Table 1.²⁶

Table 1: Nuclear Proliferation from 1945 until now

Country	Year of possessing nuclear weapons	Years separating from the previous state	Average
US	1945	0	
USSR	1949	4	
UK	1952	3	
France	1960	8	
China	1964	4	
Israel	1966	2	
India	1974	8	
South Africa	1979 (Dismantled its weapons in 1990)	5	
Pakistan	1998	19	
North Korea	2006	8	6.1 years for the new country



This means that, during 1945–2022, the number of nuclear countries increased at one new country every 7.7 years, but the rate of spread among the second-tier countries, the non-great states, was 8.4 years. This means that the transition is slowing down as the spread among the great powers was at 3.8 years for the new country, while the rate among the second-tier countries increased to 8.4 years for the new nuclear member, which means that the new accession may be between 2023–2025.

The gravity of Israel's role is that it has transferred its military nuclear capability to other countries, as it did with the apartheid regime in South Africa, whose president approved the production of six nuclear bombs, which were then dismantled after the end of this regime in 1990–1991.²⁷

It must be noted that it was Israel that paved the way for lifting the exclusivity of the five permanent members of the Security Council being the only legally enabled countries to have nuclear weapons. Israel was the first country to pave the way for nuclear proliferation, but this dangerous development did not find any significant criticism from Western diplomacy, and no sanctions were applied to Israel. Rather, technical, political and media assistance was provided, while in the Indian, Pakistani, North Korean and Iranian cases, sanctions and incitement were used, although the latter were not powerful enough to stop these countries from achieving their goal.

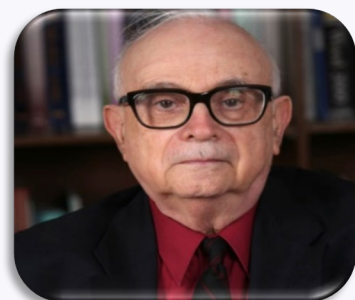


The other dangerous Israeli role in the nuclear case, is that Israel has moved from an outlaw state, being the first second-tier country to possess nuclear weapons, to a country seeking with others to impose sanctions on other violators. This has happened with Pakistan and Iran, although Iran did not announce its possession of nuclear weapons. Hence, Israel moved from the role of the accused to the role of the judge.

Fourth: The Risks of Implementing the “Crazy State” Strategy

The strategy of the “crazy state” put forward in the 1970s by Israeli professor Yehezkel Dror, who worked as a planning advisor at the Israeli Ministry of Defense, is represented in the following:²⁸

- ▶ 1. Pursuing harmful goals for other countries.
- ▶ 2. Emphasizing a strong commitment to harm.



Yehezkel Dror



- ▶ 3. A sense of moral superiority over others, even if it contradicts international standards.
- ▶ 4. Belief in the ability to choose the most appropriate tools to achieve that harm.
- ▶ 5. Seeking to provide external capabilities that help to achieve harm.
- ▶ 6. Decision makers do not care about balancing the gains and losses in managing the conflict.

Dror explains in subsequent clarifications of the “crazy state” theory that such state is one which “works as a unit to achieve rational goals by irrational means.” Accordingly, Dror says in a later study,²⁹ that Iran should fear that Israel will act as a crazy state, which is what makes Iran inclined towards reconciliation with Israel, but Iran may attack Israel if it is categorically confirmed that Israel is a really crazy state. It seems that Israel’s strategy is seeking to delude Iran to believe that Israel may be a “crazy state” so it must be avoided. However, if Iran is indisputably convinced that Israel is a “crazy state,” it will take the initiative to strike Israel, which will put it against the world. Yet, the harm that may be inflicted on Israel will be great, which would make the regional states have serious concerns regarding the prospects of what the “crazy state” will do.

Dror raises another issue which is the danger of “crazy” movements possessing unconventional weapons, whether nuclear, biological or chemical. Scientifically speaking, 25 kilos of highly enriched uranium are enough for armed organizations to produce nuclear weapons, although this is hindered by the availability of the infrastructure to produce nuclear weapons. Yet, different studies indicate that the possibility of the spread of nuclear weapons among sub-state organizations is possible due to regional instability, especially the Middle East, which is considered the least stable since the establishment of Israel.³⁰ Here, in light of the “crazy state” strategy, can a state like Israel facilitate the acquisition of certain organizations of non-conventional weapons, including nuclear ones, to use them against countries that Israel deems a threat to it? Israel has financed, trained and armed organizations and militias in many Middle Eastern countries; thus, what will prevent it from repeating this at an advanced military technology level to achieve certain goals according to the “crazy state” strategy? Israel has cooperated with some African



insurgencies, as was the case with Chad, to transport Israeli nuclear waste through the Libyan desert. It is known that the costs of burying the waste are high, given the measures taken to ensure that it does not leak into water, soil and air, as we mentioned earlier. However, some poor countries accept burying waste in their lands at cheap prices to obtain money.³¹ In all of these dangers, Israel was the one to facilitate them. Several variables intertwine with the Israeli behavior leading to the fast spread of nuclear weapons among non-state parties. The most prominent of these variables are as follows:³²

- ▶ 1. Commonality of scientific knowledge, as the logistic curve indicates the decreasing distance between the turning points of paradigm shifts. In addition, the steps for producing nuclear weapons are no longer a secret, and knowledge in this respect may develop, which would make obtaining nuclear weapons more accessible, and even less expensive, as is the case with most forms of civilian and military technology.
- ▶ 2. The immigration of nuclear scientists for various reasons. During the beginning of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, about 40 nuclear scientists immigrated to Israel.
- ▶ 3. The ability of North Korea, Pakistan, India, Israel and South Africa to acquire nuclear weapons has made other countries realize that the last wall of security is the nuclear weapon and that it is possible to possess it.
- ▶ 4. The US attacks and foreign military interventions have all taken place against “non-nuclear” countries, which reinforces the idea that nuclear weapons represent an effective deterrent. For no nuclear countries have been subjected, so far, to occupation or strategic attack.
- ▶ 5. Decreased confidence in the effectiveness of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. For after the NPT was signed in 1968 and came into force in 1970, proliferation continued. It was clearly and publicly violated many times, and some countries ended up having nuclear weapons.

Conclusion

Comparing the Iranian nuclear project, whose military objectives have not been verified yet, and the Israeli nuclear program, whose military objectives are confirmed, indicates that the risks of the Israeli nuclear program unequivocally outweigh the risks of the Iranian one. In terms of burying nuclear waste and reducing its environmental dangers, the Israeli nuclear program is 40 years ahead of the Iranian nuclear program, which makes the amount of former's waste much



larger than latter's. Moreover, Iran's area is about 63 times that of Israel, which allows it to choose larger and safer burial sites.



Likewise, it has not yet been proven that Iran has tendency to bury waste in areas outside its lands, while it is confirmed that Israel sometimes buries nuclear waste in other countries, which threatens the health of the citizens of these countries, hence it would lead to internal instability. For it is expected that the political forces of these countries would disagree over the burial of these wastes.

While Iran is a member of international institutions concerned with the proliferation of nuclear weapons, Israel, along with a very limited number of countries, are not members of these institutions. It even refuses inspection or the discussion of its nuclear weapons.

The political instability of the Arab region, which is three-fold the global average,³³ is basically due to Israel's presence, whose deterrence is mainly based on its nuclear arsenal.

Accordingly, it is a fortiori to present the Israeli nuclear program for criticism, analysis and detection more than the Iranian one, or at least they must be addressed alike.



Endnotes

- ¹ An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.
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