

# A “Nuclear-Free Zone” in the Middle East? Why Israel will not Join the Non-Proliferation Treaty

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Iran’s New President Hassan Rouhani has requested that Israel to sign and become a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as he spoke for a second time at the United Nation General Assembly. *“As long as nuclear weapons exist, the threat of their use exists,”* Rouhani said, citing the American bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Rouhani is calling for *“nuclear-free zone”* in the Middle East. Israel is the only country in the Middle East that had not and will not sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Israel would use nuclear weapons if it felt it was threatened by any nation in the Middle East.

The nuclear capability of Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) defensive capabilities just reached another plateau this past April. It purchased its 5th nuclear submarine that can be deployed anywhere in the world with first strike capability. The Israel News Agency reported that Israel purchased a fifth Dolphin class submarine called the *“INS Rahav”* from Germany. The article headlined *“Israel Launches Ninth Submarine, Ready To Strike Iran Nuclear Weapons.”* Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said *“The submarines are a strong, strategic tool for the IDF. The State of Israel is ready to act anytime, anywhere - on land, sea and air - in order to ensure the security of Israel’s citizens.”* The submarines are equipped with Israeli-designed Popeye missiles that are capable of carrying nuclear warheads. It is no secret that Israel has nuclear weapons. Some estimates suggest that Israel has between 100 and 400 nuclear weapons. No one knows exactly how many nuclear bombs Israel possesses, but we do know they have the capability to produce them at a moment’s notice.

Mordechai Vanunu, a former Israeli technician at the Dimona nuclear research center in the Negev desert exposed Israel’s nuclear program to the world in the 1986 Sunday Times (UK). Vanunu was kidnapped in Italy by Mossad agents and brought to Israel to face an Israeli court. He was convicted and imprisoned for more than 18 years at Shikma Prison in Ashkelon, Israel. Half of his prison term was in solitary confinement. He was eventually released in 2004. Since then, Vanunu has been arrested and even imprisoned for violating his parole. He was also arrested for trying to leave Israel at one time. Former Israeli Prime Minister and Noble Peace Prize winner Shimon Peres said *“he was a traitor to this country”*.

Since Israel is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; the Dimona Nuclear Research center is not subject to inspections from the international community such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). According to the *Federation of American Scientists* in a 2007 report, Israel has between 75 and 400 nuclear warheads, but some estimates have their nuclear warheads at less than 200. It is also known that Israel has the ability to deliver them by intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with a range of 5,500 kilometers or 3,400 miles, the Jericho III missile named after the biblical city of Jericho,

various aircrafts and of course submarines. The report stated the following:

*By the late 1990s the U.S. Intelligence Community estimated that Israel possessed between 75-130 weapons, based on production estimates. The stockpile would certainly include warheads for mobile Jericho-1 and Jericho-2 missiles, as well as bombs for Israeli aircraft, and may include other tactical nuclear weapons of various types. Some published estimates even claimed that Israel might have as many as 400 nuclear weapons by the late 1990s. We believe these numbers are exaggerated, and that Israel's nuclear weapons inventory may include less than 100 nuclear weapons. Stockpiled plutonium could be used to build additional weapons if so decided*

Israel's nuclear program began after World War II. Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion once said "What Einstein, Oppenheimer, and Teller, the three of them are Jews, made for the United States, could also be done by scientists in Israel, for their own people". David Ben-Gurion wanted to establish a Jewish State with a military force that would repel an attack by any of its adversaries especially in the Arab world. Ben-Gurion's speech to the elected assembly of Palestine Jews on October 2nd, 1947 made it clear on the intentions of a new Jewish state:

*Political developments have swept us on to a momentous parting of the ways - from Mandate to independence. Today, beyond our ceaseless work in immigration, settlement and campaign, we are set three blazing tasks, whereof fulfillment will condition our perpetuity: defense, a Jewish State and Arab-Jewish Cupertino, in that order of importance and urgency.*

*Security is our chief problem. I do not minimize the virtue of statehood even within something less than all the territory of the Land of Israel on either bank of the Jordan; but security comes unarguably first. It dominated our concerns since the Yishuv [Jewish community in Palestine] began from the start of colonization we knew we must, in the main, guarantee it ourselves. But recent upsets and upheavals in Palestine, in the Middle East and in the wide world, and in British and international politics as well, magnify it from a local problem of current safety into Zionism's hinge of destiny. In scope, in intensity, in purport, it is entirely different now. Just think of the new factors that invest the problem with a political significance of unprecedented gravity - and I could add a dozen others: the anti-Zionist policy pursued by the Mandatory Government during the past ten years, the obliteration of European Jewry with the willing aid of the acknowledged leader of the Palestine Arabs, the establishment of an Arab League active and united only in combating Zionism, Bevin's ugly war against the Jews, the crisis in Britain and its political and economic aftermath, the creation of armed forces in the neighboring States, the intrusion of the Arab Legion. And not a single Jewish unit exists.*

*We can stand up to any aggression launched from Palestine or its border, but more in potential than yet in fact. The conversion from potential to actual is now our major, blinding headache. It will mean the swiftest, widest mobilization, here and abroad, of capacity to organize, of our resources in economics and manpower, our science and technology, our civic sense. It must be an all-out effort, sparing no man.*

Several months later on May 14th, 1948, the state of Israel became a reality with David Ben-Gurion as its first Prime Minister. Ben-Gurion, Executive head of the World Zionist Organization in 1946 until 1956 and the head of the influential Weizmann Institute of

Science and Defense Ministry Scientist Ernest David Bergmann recruited Jewish Scientists from abroad during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Israel recruited and funded Jewish scientists to help Israel establish a nuclear program. By 1949, the Israel Defense Forces Science Corps or 'Hemed Gimmel' was in search of Uranium in the Negev Desert, but only small amounts were discovered in phosphate deposits. Hemed Gimmel financed several students to study nuclear technology overseas. One of the students attended the University of Chicago to study under Enrico Fermi, who developed the Chicago Pile-1, the first nuclear reactor. Fermi also made scientific contributions to nuclear, quantum and particle physics among others.

By the late 1950s Shimon Peres had established LEKEM, or the 'Science liaison Bureau' a new intelligence service that would search for technology, materials and equipment needed for Israel's nuclear program.

By 1952, Hemed Gimmel was under Israel's Ministry of Defense to become the Division of Research and Infrastructure (EMET). By June 1952, The Israel Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC) was established with Ernest David Bergmann as the first chairman. Hemed Gimmel was renamed Machon 4 which became the "chief laboratory" of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC). France was a major partner for Israel's nuclear program. France also sold weapons to Israel. The France-Israel relationship was instrumental in the development of the Dimona Nuclear Research Center. Israel signed American President Dwight Eisenhower's *Atoms for Peace*, an agreement for peaceful nuclear cooperation between the U.S. and Israel along with Turkey to build a "small swimming pool research reactor" at Nachal Soreq.

It was the first step to building the Dimona nuclear research center in the Negev desert in collaboration with France who faced political turmoil in its former colonies in North Africa. Israel also faced Arab hostilities in the Middle East, so the cooperation on matters regarding new military technology complemented each other. On March 20, 1957 a public signing ceremony to build a "small swimming-pool research reactor" took place between France and Israel. But the reality was that France and Israel collaborated to build a larger facility at Dimona. In *Israel and the Bomb* by Avner Cohen, he describes Ben Gurion's ambitious plan regarding Israel's nuclear program was advanced through the *Atoms for Peace* Initiative:

*With the return of Ben Gurion to power in 1955, nuclear energy became a matter of national priority. Ben Gurion gave political backing and financial support to those in the Ministry of Defense who were committed to promoting nuclear energy-Peres, Bergmann, Mardor, and the nuclear enthusiasts at Machon 4. There was also a change in the international climate concerning nuclear energy, in the wake of Eisenhower's December 1953 Atoms-for-Peace initiative. Until then, nuclear energy in the United States, Canada, and Britain, the three major countries dealing with nuclear energy, was largely closed to other countries. The Atoms for Peace Initiative made nuclear energy technology available to the rest of the world.*

The United States under President Eisenhower allowed Israel to seek a nuclear program that would advance its defense capabilities militarily. By 1958, the construction of the Negev Nuclear Research Center located in the Negev desert in secret through the *Protocol of Sevres* agreement. It was a secret agreement between Israel, France and Great Britain at Sevres, France to overthrow Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser through an invasion of Egypt after Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. Four days after the Sèvres meeting, Israeli

forces invaded Egyptian territory. French and British forces invaded shortly after they vetoed a US sponsored UN Security Council resolution under the guise that they would separate both Israeli and Egyptian forces after Egypt refused their call to withdraw from the Suez Canal.

✘ In 1958, Charles de Gaulle became President of France. Almost immediately after he assumed office, he wanted to end France's assistance to Israel's nuclear program. He would only support Israel's nuclear program if international inspectors were allowed to inspect Dimona and that Israel would declare that its nuclear program was for peaceful purposes and that under no circumstances reprocess plutonium. Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres negotiated with the French government allowing a window of opportunity for French companies to continue its work until 1966 with the Israeli government. Israel also had declared its nuclear program was "peaceful".

BBC News received secret documents that the British government also supported Israel's nuclear program by sending illegal and restricted materials that started in the 1950's. In 1961, the Ben-Gurion informed the Canadian government that a pilot plutonium-separation plant would be built at the Dimona facility. By 1962, the nuclear reactor at Dimona went "critical" meaning a critical mass with a small amount of fissile material was needed for a sustained nuclear chain reaction. Shortly after, Israel secretly acquired more than 90 tons of uranium oxide (yellowcake) from Argentina to fuel the reactor. By 1965 the Israeli reprocessing plant was completed and ready to convert the reactor's fuel rods into weapons grade plutonium for a nuclear bomb. After the Six-Day War, Israel went live producing nuclear weapons. A new era began in the Middle East. One that was a dangerous step to a nuclear disaster if Israel decided to use its nuclear weapons against an Arab country.

In Seymour M. Hersh's *'The Samson Option: Israel's Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy'* stated the concerns Israel's leaders had, especially Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion if they did not obtain nuclear weapons. Hersh wrote:

*"What is Israel?" he was quoted by an aide as asking. ". . . Only a small spot. One dot! How can it survive in this Arab world?" Ben-Gurion believed that he understood Arab character and was persuaded that as long as Arabs thought they could destroy the Jewish state, there would be no peace and no recognition of Israel. Many Israelis, survivors of the Holocaust, came to believe in ein brera, or "no alternative," the doctrine that Israel was surrounded by implacable enemies and therefore had no choice but to strike out. In their view, Hitler and Nasser were interchangeable.*

*For these Israelis, a nuclear arsenal was essential to the survival of the state. In public speeches throughout the 1950s, Ben Gurion repeatedly linked Israel's security to its progress in science. "Our security and independence require that more young people devote themselves to science and research, atomic and electronic research, research of solar energy . . . and the like," he told the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, in November 1955.*

*Ernst Bergmann explicitly articulated the ein brera fears in a letter two years later: "I am convinced . . . that the State of Israel needs a defense research program of its own, so that we shall never again be as lambs led to the slaughter."*

*Ben-Gurion, Shimon Peres, and Ernst Bergmann believed that Israel's independent arsenal finally could provide what President Eisenhower would not—the nuclear*

umbrella.

Israel's nuclear program was built on the belief that it had "no alternative" but to build a nuclear weapon to deter Arab aggression. Their experience with the Holocaust justifies their intentions on maintaining their nuclear weapons. Israel's believes that another Holocaust can be prevented, this time not from Germany but from Iran. But many Israeli's during the development stages of nuclear weapons were not keen on obtaining a nuclear bomb because of the Holocaust:

*"Less compelling to the military men was the moral argument against the bomb raised by some on the left and in academia: that the Jewish people, victims of the Holocaust, had an obligation to prevent the degeneration of the Arab-Israeli dispute into a war of mass destruction" Stated Hersh. " Those who held that view did not underestimate the danger of a conventional arms race, but believed that, as Simha Flapan, their passionate spokesman, wrote, "the qualitative advantages of Israel—social cohesion and organization, education and technical skills, intelligence and moral incentive—can be brought into play only in a conventional war fought by men."*

Another aspect of Israel's foreign policy one should consider is the 'Samson Option,' a policy that calls for a retaliation using nuclear weapons against an enemy who threatens the Jewish homeland of its existence. Hersh explains:

*Dimona's supporters had convinced most of the leadership that only nuclear weapons could provide the absolute and final deterrent to the Arab threat, and only nuclear weapons could convince the Arabs—who were bolstered by rapidly growing Soviet economic and military aid—that they must renounce all plans for military conquest of Israel and agree to a peace settlement. **With a nuclear arsenal there would be no more Masadas in Israel's history, a reference to the decision of more than nine hundred Jewish defenders—known as the Zealots—to commit suicide in A.D. 73 rather than endure defeat at the hands of the Romans.***

*In its place, argued the nuclear advocates, would be the Samson Option. Samson, according to the Bible, had been captured by the Philistines after a bloody fight and put on display, with his eyes torn out, for public entertainment in Dagon's Temple in Gaza. He asked God to give him back his strength for the last time and cried out, "Let my soul die with the Philistines." With that, he pushed apart the temple pillars, bringing down the roof and killing himself and his enemies. For Israel's nuclear advocates, the Samson Option became another way of saying "Never again."*

*[In a 1976 essay in Commentary, Norman Podhoretz accurately summarized the pronuclear argument in describing what Israel would do if abandoned by the United States and overrun by Arabs: "The Israelis would fight . . . with conventional weapons for as long as they could, and if the tide were turning decisively against them, and if help in the form of resupply from the United States or any other guarantors were not forthcoming, it is safe to predict that they would fight with nuclear weapons in the end. ... It used to be said that the Israelis had a Masada complex . . .but if the Israelis are to be understood in terms of a 'complex' involving suicide rather than surrender and rooted in a relevant precedent of Jewish history, the example of Sarnson, whose suicide brought about the destruction of his enemies, would be more appropriate than Masada, where in committing suicide the Zealots killed only themselves and took no Romans with them." Podhoretz, asked years later about his essay, said that his conclusions*

*about the Samson Option were just that—his conclusions, and not based on any specific information from Israelis or anyone else about Israel’s nuclear capability.]*

In a White House press conference on May 18, 2009, US President Barack Obama’s concern about “*the potential pursuit of a nuclear weapon by Iran.*” The United States and other Western nations have not announced any plans to disarm Israel’s nuclear weapons but rather focused its attention on Iran’s nuclear program. Obama said “*Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon would not only be a threat to Israel and a threat to the United States, but would be profoundly destabilizing in the international community as a whole and could set off a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.*” Israel already won the arms race in the Middle East. What is to stop Israel’s “Zealot” mentality from using nuclear weapons in the Middle East? Israel has threatened Iran in the past.

In a 2006 interview with Reuters former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres “*the president of Iran should remember that Iran can also be wiped off the map.*” It was a response after a false claim Israel and its allies made on Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s comment in a 2005 speech at the Ministry of Interior conference hall in Tehran called “*The World without Zionism*” when he said Israel must be “*wiped off the map*” which was misinterpreted. Earlier this year, former Prime Minister Ehud Barak said that the US and Israel would take action against Iran, “I don’t see it as a binary kind of situation: either they [the Iranians] turn nuclear or we have a fully fledged war the size of the Iraqi war or even the war in Afghanistan,” Barak continued “What we basically say is that if worse comes to worst, there should be a readiness and an ability to launch a surgical operation that will delay them by a significant time frame and probably convince them that it won’t work because the world is determined to block them.” Rouhani is seeking negotiations that would put Iran, the United States and Israel on a path to a peaceful resolution. One that will recognize Iran’s right to a “peaceful” nuclear program for its country so that they can export more oil and use the revenues it earned for the benefit of the Iranian people. But do not expect any significant breakthrough between Iran and the US/Israel alliance that seeks to dominate the Middle East politically, economically and militarily.

The Obama administration is not seeking any negotiations with Iran unless they stop its nuclear program which will not happen. Iran will insist that they are signatories to the NPT and have an “inalienable right” to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Israel will not be a signatory to the NPT because “*This resolution is deeply flawed and hypocritical. It ignores the realities of the Middle East and the real threats facing the region and the entire world*” according to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Another reason Israel will not sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty is because they are victims of the Holocaust which is why they have violated hundreds of U.N. Security Council resolutions and has used chemical weapons on the Palestinians. The talks between Iran and the US that will be held in Geneva will fail come this October because the US wants to dominate Iran. Iran has its principles it will stand by, but so will the US on Israel’s behalf. The US and its staunch allies want Syria, Lebanon, the Gaza strip and the West Bank and every nation on earth under their rule. That is the plan.

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