

Israel Must Be Held To Same Nuclear Scrutiny as Iran

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First, we went after nonexistent nuclear weapons in Iraq, and now we are consumed with the possibility that Iran might develop nuclear weapons sometime in the future.

Hillary Clinton has declared that she would obliterate Iran if it ever attacked Israel with a nuclear weapon. But what nobody wants to talk about is the fact that Israel has had a secret nuclear weapons program for more than 30 years that has produced well over 200 nuclear bombs.

Ever since Mordechai Vanunu, the Israeli nuclear technician, confirmed the existence of Israel's nuclear weapons program with his photographs of the secret underground bomb facility that were published in the London Sunday Times in 1986, the world has known that Israel has been making nuclear bombs but has pretended that they do not exist. Israel continues to publicly deny that it possesses nuclear weapons.

I talked with Vanunu in Jerusalem in 2005, and here are my notes from that interview:

"I worked from 1976 to 1985 at the Israeli secret underground nuclear weapons production facility at the Dimona nuclear plant in the Negev desert. During my time there, I was involved in processing plutonium for 10 nuclear bombs per year. I realized that my country had already processed enough plutonium for 200 nuclear weapons. I became really afraid when we started processing lithium 6, which is only used for the hydrogen bomb.

"I felt that I had to prevent a nuclear holocaust in the Middle East, so I took 60 pictures of the underground nuclear weapons processing plant, some 75 meters under the Dimona plant. I resigned my post and left Israel in 1986. I first went to Australia and then made a connection with the Times in London. After a group of nuclear scientists verified my photos as proving Israeli nuclear weapons production, my story was published in England. A few months later, I was kidnapped by the Israelis in Rome and sent secretly by ship to Israel, where I was subjected to a closed military trial without counsel. I was sentenced to 18 years in prison. I spent 12 years in solitary confinement.

"Now I am trapped inside Israel, and I'm being threatened with more prison time for speaking to people like you. I want to leave Israel and come to America where I can live as a free human being."

(Vanunu was released from prison in April 2004 but was prohibited from leaving Israel. The Israeli government continues to keep him in Israel against his will. Criminal action is pending against him for speaking to journalists and foreigners.)

The fact of the matter is that Israel is using nuclear blackmail against the U.S. Essentially, Israel is saying that if we don't agree to use our nuclear weapons against Iran, then they will use theirs. Israel is determined to keep its monopoly on nuclear weapons in the Middle East and is using its nuclear arsenal to force the U.S. to support its demand. It's time for our politicians to refuse to be blackmailed into a policy that is detrimental to achieving our goal of a nuclear-free Middle East. Most importantly, the U.S. must resist being pushed into attacking Iran to preserve Israel's nuclear monopoly.

It is time to deal openly with Israel's nuclear weapons. We need to recognize that the epicenter of the nuclear arms race in the Middle East is Israel's secret bomb factory, 250 feet underground in the Negev desert. The U.S. must join with the international community in opening Israel's nuclear weapons program to inspection and monitoring.

The only way to secure a nuclear-free Middle East is to have every nation in the region play by the same book of rules, and this must include Israel.

Joe Parko is a retired college professor living in Crossville. He was the Quaker delegate on a peace mission to Israel and the Palestinian territories in 2005.

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