

ISRAEL'S NUCLEAR GAME: THE U.S. STAKE

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Eight hundred years ago, the Crusader fortress of Krak des Chevaliers—described by T. E. Lawrence as “perhaps the best preserved and most wholly admirable castle in the world”¹—was on the cutting edge of Mediterranean military technology. What gave Krak its special impregnability in the Crusaders’ pre-gunpowder days, according to the British historian Sir Steven Runciman, was that it was built on solid rock, making it invulnerable not only to the attacking mangonel or ballista (as were most of the Crusaders’ other castles) but also to the danger of undermining by hostile engineers.²

In our day, there is a state in the same region that is also on the cutting edge of contemporary military technology—Israel. But Israel’s present capabilities, unlike the defensive architecture of Krak des Chevaliers, could bring mass destruction to its future opponents and, at only slightly decreasing orders of probability, to Israel and the whole of human civilization. The very scale and sophistication of Israel’s capabilities in the nuclear-military field therefore compel us to think through their implications seriously—and especially so in an era when the two supergiants in the nuclear league are planning to draw down their current substantial nuclear advantage.

The facts concerning Israel’s development of a nuclear capability have not been in much serious dispute since October 1987, when the London *Sunday Times* published the revelations of former Israeli nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu. Vanunu provided the detailed evidence that allowed nuclear doyens Theodore Taylor and Frank Barnaby to calculate that, over the past 20 years, an Israeli plutonium extraction plant near the Negev town of Dimona has been producing 40 kilograms of pluto-

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nium a year, sufficient to build 10 atomic bombs according to advanced specifications. These experts calculated that Israel has used this plutonium to assemble “at least 100 and as many as 200 nuclear weapons of varying destructive power.”³ Vanunu’s revelations also indicated that the Israelis have been producing significant quantities of deuterium and tritium—substances used in the manufacture of thermonuclear warheads—and that they appear to be working on developing these vastly more destructive weapons.

For its part, the Israeli government tried to deflect any serious discussion of these revelations. Government leaders once again wheeled out the standard line that “Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East.” (Back in 1968, U.S. officials pressed Yitzhak Rabin, then Israel’s ambassador to the United States and now defense minister, to explain what this circumlocution actually meant. According to Mideast specialist William Quandt, Rabin replied that it meant that Israel would not be the first to test nuclear weapons in the Middle East or to reveal their existence publicly. It notably did *not* mean that Israel promised not to be the first to acquire them.⁴)

While it hotly protested Vanunu’s accusations, the Israeli government nevertheless gave a virtual imprimatur to his credibility by luring him out of hiding in a classic honey-pot operation, and then apparently kidnapping him to put him on trial in Israel. There, the indictment against him admitted that the *Sunday Times* article contained “much top secret information concerning the [Dimona] Nuclear Research Center . . . including the photographs he shot and provided to the newspaper.” In March 1988, he was convicted by a Jerusalem court on three charges of espionage and treason.⁵

Haggard and tightly guarded, Vanunu was getting his day in court, however indifferent the court was to the considerations of conscience that motivated him. By contrast, the issues Vanunu raised so dramatically in public are still getting nothing like an open airing in the United States, and only slightly more of an airing in Israel itself.⁶ Why did Israel develop an atomic bomb? Who is it aimed against, and under what circumstances would it be used? Is there reason for the United States to be concerned? The answers to these questions are hardly as simple as they might seem.

Israel’s Nuclear Deterrent: A Delusion?

At first glance it would seem axiomatic that any Israeli nuclear capability would be aimed in some way at “hostile Arabs.” Israeli strategic thinker

Shlomo Aronson has summarized the differing views on the precise role of the nuclear factor in Israel's overall security planning in the following way:

The Likud tried to use the strategy of nuclear monopoly and total deterrence in blatant and dangerous ways — which tied in with control over territories heavily populated with Arabs. [Labor Alignment leader Shimon] Peres' concept of security, on the other hand, presumed that Israeli nuclear deterrence can ensure the continued existence of Israel — within 1967's borders and within the boundaries of territorial compromise. Deterrence . . . can, in conjunction with persistent negotiations with pragmatic Arab nations — although not with the PLO, which has never been pragmatic — justify the Israeli claim to the right to establish territorial security. Such a strategy would prevent Israel's dependence on atomic weapons alone.⁷

Any consideration of Israeli nuclear deterrence of its Arab neighbors and of the threat of Israel's battlefield use of nuclear weapons implied therein, however, has to deal — as Aronson does not — with the immense problems imposed by the geography involved. Lobbing a nuclear warhead into Damascus from Kiryat Shimona, after all, would be like sending one from San Francisco into San Jose — easy to do, but the launcher should be ready to duck to avoid his own fallout. The credibility of a direct Israeli nuclear deterrent aimed against its most likely Arab foes, in most scenarios, is therefore highly questionable.

One of the Israeli strategic specialists who has dealt with this constraint is Tel Aviv University's Yair Evron. Evron points out that if the intention of an Israeli nuclear deterrent was to deter the Arabs from producing their own nuclear capability, then the plan backfired, since it has only spurred Arab attempts to nuclearize.⁸ Listing a number of other ways in which Israel's nuclear effort might have been aimed at compellence or deterrence of the Arabs, Evron finds that in all of these, too, the Israeli deterrent or compellent has not proved effective. This lack of effectiveness, Evron writes, derives mainly from the ambiguities necessarily attending any deterrent that remains undeclared and for which no clear doctrine of usage has yet been enunciated: "In the absence of a doctrine for the use of the nuclear weapons . . . a nuclear threat by Israel might come too late, or — because of the ambiguity surrounding Israel's nuclear preparedness — may not be credible."⁹

Do the Arabs feel deterred by the nuclear imbalance? This is a difficult judgment to make since Arab political leaders are heavily constrained from openly admitting to such a glaring strategic imbalance. One of Clausewitz's main principles, after all, is that the commander should attend first to

bolstering the morale of his own forces and only then to attacking that of the enemy. Israeli writers in the “studied-ignorance” school—“We still cannot be sure whether Israel actually has a nuclear capability or not”—have worked hard at marshalling evidence that the Arabs, too, share their ignorance on this score. Yet the publication of the Vanunu revelations forced the Arab leaders (as it forced some Israelis) to shed the veil of ignorance and to address the question of the region’s nuclearization more openly. In an interview in January 1987, for example, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad went so far as to admit, “Highly placed sources affirm that Israel has the ability to manufacture and possess a nuclear bomb.” His reaction? “Of course that prompts us to think in technical terms of confronting such a threat.” Inscrutable as ever, the longtime Syrian leader gave no further details.¹⁰

Assad also took care in that interview to stress that nuclear inferiority need not force the Syrians to be deterred from any favored course of action. He noted that the United States had been defeated in a protracted war with nonnuclear Vietnam, and he remarked that “if Israel attacks Damascus with a nuclear bomb, Israel itself will not be safe from the dangers.” He also made the following reference to the possibility that Syria might rely on a Soviet counterdeterrent: “There are people in the world who could not remain idle if the atomic bomb were used, not for our sake but for their sake and for the sake of human life.” In an interview I conducted with Assad’s defense minister, Mustafa Tlas, in the summer of 1987, Tlas said that former Soviet premier Aleksei Kosygin had assured the Syrians that if the Israelis were to use nuclear weapons against the Soviets’ friends, the Soviets “would respond.”¹¹

Of course, it is only to be expected that deterrees are reluctant to admit to the fact of their deterrence at the time. But can they at least be more frank in retrospect (as Robert MacNamara has been with respect to the Cuban missile crisis)? There is certainly one example of the Arabs apparently *not* having been deterred from attacking Israel in an instance when Israel already possessed a nuclear capability, even if it had not yet actually assembled nuclear weapons. This was the October 1973 war.

In summer 1987 I had the opportunity to discuss the Arab leaders’ calculations during their planning for the 1973 offensive with a key Egyptian participant, former information minister Mohamed Heikal. Heikal had been a close confidant of each of the two successive Egyptian presidents responsible for masterminding the 1973 attack, Gamal Abdel-Nasser and Anwar Sadat. Against the background of a decade-long relationship of

relative trust,¹² I had no reason to think that Heikal was being anything other than frank as we discussed the issue.

Heikal explained that, since the 1960s, Egypt's leaders had always considered that there were two "big scenarios" for an Arab-Israeli confrontation that would necessarily assume the proportions of a global conflict. The first of these would be the direct intervention of the U.S. 6th Fleet; the second would be any use of nuclear weapons. Should either of these two contingencies occur, Nasser, according to Heikal, considered that "it is no longer Egypt's problem." Heikal clearly implied that President Sadat, who succeeded Nasser midway through the planning for the 1973 offensive, also used this same calculus.¹³ By implication, therefore, the Egyptian posture in 1973 — like the Syrian posture as stated by Assad in 1987 — was that the Arab side hostile to Israel need not worry about Israel's nuclear potential, because any local Israeli nuclear deterrent would be neutralized by a (presumably nuclear) Soviet extended deterrent.

Israel's Nuclear Deterrent: The Soviet and U.S. Dimensions

This picture, of an Israeli nuclear deterrent aimed at the Arabs being countered by a Soviet extended deterrent aimed at Israel, is not quite as simple as it appears since — as both Arabs and Israelis seem well aware — the Soviets have historically been reluctant to lock themselves into any firm commitments to their Arab friends that might force them willy-nilly to the brink of global nuclear war. For their part, the Israelis have sought to reinforce Soviet reluctance by building up a capability that might pose a nuclear counterthreat to the Soviet Union itself, enabling them to counter the Soviet counterdeterrent.

This is the conclusion that emerges both from the work of one of the most forthright of the pro-Israeli writers on this issue — Penn State political science professor Robert Harkavy — and from evidence concerning the hardware involved in Israel's military procurement policy. Harkavy, a self-avowed neoconservative and a staunch supporter of Israel, is someone whose writings on the Israeli nuclear issue should be taken with great seriousness by liberals who like to exempt Israel from their expressions of concern about the worldwide nuclear threat. Harkavy pays only slight lip service to the customary "studied-ignorance" pose. In a book published in 1986 he acknowledged that "the prospect of post-Holocaust Jewry's need to resort to mass nuclear destruction is by its nature an emotion-laden, raw subject," and then proceeded with a full, frank (and quite terrifying) discussion of the possible intentions of the Israeli nuclear program.¹⁴

Harkavy has produced a list of 14 possible rationales for the Israeli program that fall a good deal short of the “last-resort contingency.” This list includes two possible rationales with an explicit Soviet dimension — as well as some, which I will come to later, that have a clear U.S. dimension. One of Harkavy’s Soviet-related rationales is for Israel to pose a nuclear counter to a Soviet nuclear deterrent. By this logic, Israel would possess “a triangular second-strike capability against Arab cities and the Soviet Union to deter possible Soviet intentions to destroy Israel. . . .”¹⁵ Harkavy defines the “triangular second-strike capability” as referring to “the capability by Israel to ‘absorb’ a first nuclear strike from the Soviet Union, and to then subsequently retain the capability to launch a nuclear response against one or more Arab states. . . .”

When Harkavy is writing about non-Mideastern strategic issues he is generally considered a careful, steady scholar. So is he totally off-the-wall in his discussion of Israel-related nuclear issues? Some would argue that he is. Michael McCwire, the Brookings Institution’s specialist on Soviet military affairs, finds the above-stated rationale quite bizarre. McCwire asks rhetorically, “What would ‘a first nuclear strike from the Soviet Union’ mean for Israel?” His answer: “Three nuclear missiles from the Soviet Union could wipe out the whole of the country.”¹⁶

The other of Harkavy’s Soviet-related rationales is that the Israeli nuclear capability poses “a weak deterrent against Soviet involvement in a *conventional* war, even if that were only intended to forestall an Israeli march on Damascus or Cairo.” This sounds broadly similar, of course, to NATO’s rationale of threatening a nuclear counter to any Warsaw Pact utilization of its formidable conventional forces. But this assumes a lot. Are the Israelis to be allowed to march on Cairo or Damascus with impunity? Under present circumstances the United States would likely rush to compete with the Soviets to prevent at least the first of these contingencies. For his part, McCwire states flatly that in this situation, “Russia would not allow itself to be deterred.” If the Israelis transmitted the deterrent threat to Moscow in private, he explained, the Soviet Union would immediately either publicize the threat or issue its own counterdeterrent threat.

The pertinent question, of course, is not whether Harkavy is off-the-wall when he talks of the Israeli nuclear program deterring the Soviets, but whether Israeli military planners actually think this way. If we look at the kinds of nuclear-capable delivery vehicles Israel has been acquiring and developing, some interesting conclusions emerge. Much of the equipment Israel has acquired from the United States over the years is dual-capable; it can carry either conventional or nuclear warheads. For example,

the Lance missile and the F-4 fighter have long had a role in NATO's nuclear planning. The F-4 has a ferry range of "only" 2,300 miles, but in the years since it acquired the F-4, Israel has also acquired F-15 and F-16 fighters. The F-15 has a ferry range of 3,570 miles if used with conformal fuel tanks.¹⁷ In addition, the Israeli air force also deploys three in-flight refueling aircraft that can at least double the range of a corresponding number of aircraft. The Israelis showed how effectively they can undertake in-flight refueling when they bombed the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 and the Tunis headquarters of the PLO in late 1985. The idea of Israel being able to deliver aircraft-carried nuclear bombs to targets deep inside the Soviet Union is thus not as implausible as it might at first seem.

The range of the Lance surface-to-surface missile (SSM) is, at 110 kilometers (just under 70 miles), far less than that of the F-4. But the Israelis have worked hard to develop their own SSM, with a range far longer than that of the Lance. In July 1987, *International Defense Review* reported that two months earlier Israel had successfully tested a Jericho-2 intermediate-range ballistic missile to a range of 510 miles. "The maximum range is projected soon to be as much as 900 miles (1,450 km)," the journal continued, attributing this projection to "informed U.S. sources."¹⁸ Such a range would enable the Israeli missile to be launched from Israeli soil, not only against a whole slew of Arab capitals—plus, possibly, even Teheran—but also against targets in the southern Soviet Union.

A further possible clue to Israeli intentions comes from reports concerning the nuclear research and development venture that Israel has conducted with South Africa. According to speculations in the London press in 1984, this venture included efforts toward development of a nuclear-powered submarine (everywhere the workhorse of a viable second-strike capability) and a cruise missile with a potential range of over 900 miles.¹⁹

Additional pieces of raw evidence surfaced when Iranian students pieced together the shredded CIA files they seized from the U.S. Embassy in Teheran. Among the documents they published were the minutes of various meetings between Iranian and Israeli military leaders in 1977 and 1978, before the Iranian revolution, including discussions of the top-secret collaboration on "Project Flower"—the project for testing and developing the Jericho-2. According to these documents, the Israelis conducted a successful test launch of "Flower" in July 1977. At other points in the minutes, Israel's then foreign minister Moshe Dayan asserts that "Flower," with its 750-kilogram payload, would be nuclear-capable, and Israeli navy commander Rear Admiral M. Barkai expresses his interest in "enhancing the Flower project to enable it to be launched from submarines."²⁰

These strands of evidence, taken together, would seem to indicate that for some years Israeli planners have been pursuing nuclear options that go well beyond the immediate goal of "detering hostile Arabs." And such options do affect — whether intentionally or not — the security perceptions of that nearby nuclear colossus, the Soviet Union. How have the Soviets responded?

A review of some two dozen articles published or broadcast in the Soviet media over the past four years on the topic of Israeli nuclearization indicates that the clear tendency of Soviet analysts is to locate this issue fairly and squarely within the scope of U.S. strategic planning.²¹ Thus, they minimize or ignore reports that would indicate any significant U.S. concern that the Israeli program might be running out of control. Instead, they portray successive U.S. administrations as essentially conniving in the transfer of nuclear expertise and materials to Israel in an effort to build up Israel's nuclear arsenal as a supplement to their own.

One very explicit example of this view came in a commentary about the July 1987 revelation of the Jericho-2 test that was broadcast by a Soviet Hebrew-language radio station. "There appears to be a sound basis," the commentator said, "for the belief that the U.S. military establishment has already begun to draw lines and arrows on the maps, indicating routes from Israeli launching sites to targets in our country."²² In September 1987, a commentator on the station argued that the problem with the Jericho-2 missiles "does not lie in the Israeli missiles themselves, but primarily in the fact that Israel maintains a strategic pact with the United States and consequently forms part of the U.S. potential, including that of nuclear missiles. If the United States divests itself of its medium-range missiles while Israel does not divest itself of its missiles, it is clear that the Soviet Union will treat this Israeli potential as part of the U.S. strategic potential."²³

For the Soviets, considering Israel's nuclear potential as supplementary to that of the United States would make it seem slightly worrisome but not excessively so. What, after all, are 200 more nuclear warheads when added to the 13,000 strategic warheads that the United States will still possess, even after it dismantles its intermediate-range nuclear arsenal? (Moreover, many U.S. warheads are already targeted for the southern Soviet Union from the eastern Mediterranean and other maritime points south.) Belittling Israel's own interest in developing doomsday weapons presumably also helps the Soviets fend off the inevitable counterdemands from their Arab friends that they, too, be given access to nuclear technology.

There are thus strong incentives for the Soviets to sweep the whole issue of Israeli nuclearization quietly under the carpet of bilateral superpower

relations. But in the end, they are unable to do this. For just as in any other instance of nuclear proliferation, one of their chief concerns stems from the unpredictability of Israel's nuclear potential. To Soviet strategists, after all, the "Sarajevo syndrome" of a major war being sparked by an unforeseen accident remains the most potent strategic nightmare. In October 1985, Igor Belyayev touched a raw Soviet nerve when he wrote in a major two-part article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* that "Israel may launch the nuclear weapons it possesses at any time." His reaction to this unpredictability was to issue a potent counterthreat: "It is not difficult," he warned, "to predict the destructive consequences, moreover the most destructive, which are similar to a chain reaction."²⁴

Nor can Americans enjoy any complacency about that reaction being limited to the Eurasian landmass, since Israeli nuclearization could drag the United States itself over the nuclear threshold or, by upping the ante with the Soviets, trigger the two superpowers' Faustian pact of mutually assured destruction. Israel's nuclear capabilities also have a strong, more generalized political effect on U.S. decision making.

Another of Robert Harkavy's 14 rationales would have the Israeli nuclear weapons program operating as "a weapon of leverage against the United States and possibly other Western states to ensure a continued supply of conventional arms and a modicum of diplomatic support."²⁵ This rationale relates directly to the classic doves' dilemma described by Western strategists, wherein a peace-loving Western regime is told by a Third World client that unless the patron delivers more and more conventional arms, the client might nuclearize. Thus, the patron is forced ever further to fuel the international arms race.

The situation between Israel and the United States, as even Harkavy admits, has gone beyond that dilemma. For the threat implied by the client in this case is no longer merely to develop nuclear weapons—since most American policymakers admit in private that this stage has already been passed—but, nowadays, to go even nearer the brink of nuclear use. Do we have any examples of Israel using the threat of nuclear use to squeeze weapons or other support from the United States?

One very clear example of Israel using nuclear blackmail against the United States can be found in a January 1987 statement by Amos Rubin soon after he was installed as economic adviser to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. In a dispatch from Jerusalem, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported Rubin as saying, "If left to its own, [Israel] will have no choice but to fall back on a riskier defense which will endanger itself and the world at large." Rubin explained that by "riskier defense" he meant nuclear

defense. This, he concluded, was “another . . . reason why the U.S. should continue to ease the burden Israel bears in fielding massive conventional forces.”²⁶

Another instance of possible Israeli nuclear blackmail of the United States took place during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. (This example is less clear-cut than Rubin’s threat but potentially more relevant for analytical purposes, since it took place in the midst of a real-life crisis.) According to a *Time* magazine story published in April 1976, “Israel’s 13 [nuclear] bombs . . . were hastily assembled” during the night of October 8–9, 1973 and later “sent to desert arsenals.”²⁷ That night was a significant one because the Israelis had still failed to turn back the momentum of the Arab offensive of two days before. Henry Kissinger was in the White House at the time, as both national security adviser and secretary of state. How did he see the situation?

In his memoirs, Kissinger makes no mention of having learned that night about any Israeli nuclear preparations. (The *Time* article would later report that the United States learned about the preparations through data picked up by an SR-71 spy plane. But it did not say when this information was received.) What Kissinger does report, however, is that at 1:45 in the morning, Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz woke him asking for an urgent and extensive resupply of (conventional) weapons. “The unworthy thought crossed my mind that perhaps the Israelis wanted to commit us to a schedule of deliveries now,” Kissinger wrote, “before their probable victory removed the urgency.”²⁸ So Washington’s most powerful foreign-policy aide demurred, going back to sleep until Dinitz called again about an hour later.

At a face-to-face meeting convened early the next morning, Dinitz and his defense attaché made their most serious pitch yet, according to Kissinger, and succeeded in persuading him to change his mind. How did they achieve this? According to Kissinger’s record, it was by recounting the enormity of the losses the Israeli forces had suffered in those first two days of the war. “What Dinitz was reporting,” Kissinger wrote, “would require a fundamental reassessment of strategy. Our entire diplomacy and our resupply policy had been geared to a rapid Israeli victory. These assumptions were now overtaken.” But according to Kissinger’s record, at the end of that meeting, “Dinitz asked to see me alone for five minutes.”²⁹

Why should Dinitz insist on seeing Kissinger alone, since his staff aides were already fully apprised of how dire Israel’s situation was? Was there some message to convey that had greater import than the situation as already reported? Kissinger’s account of what was conveyed sounds rather lame: he says Dinitz took that opportunity to tell him that Prime Minister Golda

Meir thought the situation so serious that she would even leave Israel in the middle of the fighting to come to plead her country's case. Why should Dinitz want to keep that from Kissinger's aides? Perhaps, instead, this was the moment when the nuclear blackmail threat was delivered—explicitly or, as seems most likely, by strong implication. Whatever Dinitz did say in those off-the-record minutes, the sum total of his communication had the desired effect, and the resupply was agreed to by President Nixon later that day.³⁰

In the real-world power game of deterring and being deterred, it is unlikely that the Israelis would even have needed to resort to explicit nuclear threats in 1973, since they could have calculated with some assurance that the proper psychological outlook had already been successfully cultivated in U.S. decision-makers since at least 1968. That was the year when President Lyndon Johnson refused to accede to requests from aides that a U.S. sale of (nuclear-capable) F-4 planes to Israel be made conditional on Israel signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).³¹ No president since Johnson has ever reversed the choice he made that day, which reflects a fundamentally permissive attitude toward Israel's nuclear program—with all that it entails.

An Israeli Force de Frappe?

U.S. submission to Israeli nuclear blackmail is probably just what the Israelis were hoping they might achieve when they first contracted with France back in 1957 to help with the construction of the Dimona reactor and an associated plutonium production plant. Francis Perrin, who was France's high commissioner for atomic energy from 1951 through 1970, had been intimately involved in those early plans. As he explained in an interview with the London *Sunday Times* in 1986, "We thought the Israeli bomb was aimed against the Americans." What this meant, Perrin explained, was that the objective would be "not to launch it against America, but to say 'if you don't want to help us in a critical situation we will require you to help us, otherwise we will use our nuclear bombs.'"³²

Much the same rationale as this, indeed, was being employed by the French themselves in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the development of their own independent nuclear force—the *force de frappe*. But there are at least four critical differences between the independent French force and that of the Israelis. These differences speak to some of the more worrisome aspects of the Israeli program.

The most obvious and important distinction is that France is at peace

with its neighbors and exercises its national sovereignty over territory lying within internationally recognized borders. This stability contrasts starkly with the strategic situation of Israel, which has no mutually recognized borders along its eastern flank and which shows little sign of willingness to relinquish control over Gaza, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and the southernmost strip of Lebanon. At what stage would a successful Arab bid to regain the Israeli-occupied areas trigger Israel to bring its bombs out of the basement? Or might the Israeli command be placed in a “use them or lose them” situation, regardless of the position of the Arab front line? (According to one 1985 report, some of Israel’s nuclear-capable missiles have been emplaced inside occupied *Syrian* national territory in the Golan.³³)

A second difference between the two situations is that France has a clearly declared doctrine of nuclear deterrence that offers NATO planners (and their Warsaw Pact counterparts) reassuringly few ambiguities. France may have withdrawn from NATO’s unified military command in 1966, but it remains publicly associated with the Atlantic alliance at the political level. And at the military level, coordination between France and NATO forces is maintained through regular contacts and operational exchanges between the French and NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander (Europe), and between France and full NATO member West Germany.³⁴

Strategic coordination between the United States and Israel, by contrast, is far less explicit. Under successive memoranda of understanding on strategic cooperation concluded between Israel and the United States since 1981, Israel has offered a number of military facilities to the United States to help boost the U.S. strategic posture in the region. But this cooperation falls far short of the obligations of a formal alliance relationship. Israel guards for itself the right to make its own decisions on war and peace—and it has not hesitated to act on them. At the level of nuclear policy, the United States thus remains a potential victim of the global consequences of any Israeli decision to approach the threshold of nuclear use, while having no ability at all to participate in that decision.

A third difference between the two—less Jesuitic than it might appear at first sight—is that France developed and declared its independent *force de frappe* before the conclusion of the NPT in 1968. Under the terms of the NPT, France was therefore classified as a “nuclear-weapon state” while Israel, having no declared nuclear weapons capability at the time, was classed among the “non-nuclear-weapon states.” In the context of the treaty, the rights and duties incumbent on states in each of these two classes

are different; the treaty's major aim was to stop any non-nuclear-weapon state from crossing the line between them.

It is true that neither France nor Israel has actually signed the NPT, and that both have probably transgressed against its provisions over the past 20 years. But Israel's transgressions have not only enabled it to add itself to the list of the world's nuclear powers but have also punched a hole in the NPT regime large enough for a number of other previous non-nuclear-weapon countries to scramble through as well. South Africa is one case in point. Another is Pakistan. ("The Pakistanis learned a lot from us, politically," Israeli strategist Shai Feldman recently told me.) Israel's actions thus raise a whole new set of questions about the effectiveness of the NPT regime, and about the commitment of the United States to it, in a way that France's actions never have.

One final difference between the French and the Israeli nuclear programs concerns the bottom line. Over the quarter-century in which Israel has joined the nuclear big leagues, it has been a major recipient of U.S. foreign aid, whereas France has not received or needed a single cent. The U.S. taxpayer has thus had the privilege of helping, directly or indirectly, to bankroll a program that might lead us all to nuclear holocaust and that is meanwhile used on a more routine basis to wrangle further goodies out of the U.S. government.

The risk of secondary proliferation, of course, is increased each time another country acquires nuclear know-how and materials—all the more so if the country in question is, like Israel, a nonsignatory of the NPT. In his list of possible rationales for Israel's nuclear arsenal, Robert Harkavy put forth the idea that Israeli nuclearization might enable "use of nuclear technology transfer as a bargaining chip in dealing with other nations. . . ." ³⁵ As noted above, much evidence already exists that Israel has shared some of its military-nuclear expertise with South Africa and with Iran under the Shah. Were these instances of nuclear technology transfer necessarily in the national interest of the United States? And what about any future instances of Israel's nuclear sharing?

The U.S. government may make its own decisions on when and how to share nuclear expertise, but its refusal to face up to the facts of Israel's nuclearization leaves it impotent to deal with the seepage of American expertise that occurs through Israel—through the close links Israeli nuclear scientists have with some of their U.S. counterparts and the access they enjoy to U.S. institutions. Examples of this informational promiscuity include the frequent professional visits to the United States by right-wing Israeli scientist Yuval Ne'eman (father of the Israeli nuclear program and,

more recently, co-founder of the extreme nationalist Tehiya Party), and the visits to Israel by the U.S. nuclear physicist Edward Teller, the theoretical author of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative. (At the policy level, Robert Harkavy himself, who openly argues that Israel "probably requires a nuclear arsenal . . . to survive,"³⁶ has worked for the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and recently listed himself as a consultant to the Department of Defense.)

To restrict this seepage of strategic information to a nuclear maverick state that remains outside the NPT, U.S. policymakers should, at the very least, impose an effective quarantine on the U.S. nuclear-science community. Does the United States open its universities and research laboratories to Pakistani scientists engaged in that country's nuclear-weapons program? And would a U.S. strategist who openly sympathized with Pakistan's quest for the bomb be kept on the payroll of official bodies working in the nuclear or arms control fields? Of course not. This same calculus, then, should be applied to the Israelis and their friends.

The U.S. Stake in Israel's Nuclear Arsenal

For the United States, the fact, scope, and direction of Israel's nuclear program pose strategic and political problems of the first order. At the strategic level, the military and other implications of Israel's undeclared nuclear capabilities have to be addressed. And at the domestic political level, Congress and the administration need to devise policies that better reflect and respond to these realities.

One crucial matter that U.S. military planners need to consider is Israel's command and control procedures. Are they effective enough to prevent wildcat acts? The experience of the 1973 Mideast war suggests that this question deserves careful consideration. It still has not been established who was in command of Israeli forces on the Suez front during the final days of fighting, when Major-General Ariel Sharon broke repeated cease-fires agreed to by the political echelon in his attempts to restart the fighting there.³⁷ How can we have any more confidence that a renegade member or members of Israel's nuclear forces might not disobey orders from above, embroiling the region and perhaps the whole world in a nuclear holocaust? Even the standard command-and-control rules in use in most Western forces would not necessarily be sufficient to prevent a command breakdown, given the chronic instabilities and passions involved in Israel's case.

The second question for U.S. planners is how to react if the renegade action (from the U.S. standpoint) comes not from an individual Israeli

commander but from the Israeli government itself. If, say, that same Ariel Sharon one day succeeds in his ambition to become prime minister and Israel becomes embroiled again in war with its neighbors, what happens if Israeli forces are fast approaching Damascus (or Cairo, or Kuwait — Sharon has never been known for predictability), the Soviet Union tells Sharon to stop, threatening to interpose troops, if necessary, to force him to do so, and he says, "All right, I'll just lob one of my Jericho-2s against Baku or Yerevan." What does the United States do then? None of the steps in the scenario outlined here seem totally improbable. This is precisely what Harkavy was talking about with his "deterrent against Soviet involvement in a conventional war." This contingency, or one like it, thus merits the attention of American military planners.

It seems that, at some levels at least, this possibility has in fact received some consideration. In 1984, the strategic analyst Anthony Cordesman wrote that various scenarios might require of the United States the ability "to launch preventive conventional strikes against a small [nuclear] regional force — in this case that of a close ally, Israel, included in an ultimate emergency, whose fundamental strategic interests suddenly and without warning become opposed to those of the United States."³⁸ Other measures that could be taken leading up to such an "ultimate emergency" include the issuing of increasingly strong diplomatic demarches to the Israeli leaders, political activity in concert with European allies and the Soviets, and strong indirect signaling through changing the deployment and alert status of U.S. forces in the area.

Whether or not we can assume effective command-and-control procedures in Israel's nuclear forces, the status, locations, and operating procedures of Israel's nuclear forces ought to be a matter of intense interest to U.S. policymakers. It is thus somewhat reassuring to hear the occasional reports about CIA agents testing the radiation levels of flora around Dimona, for example, or monitoring the whereabouts of Israeli missile-launchers through photo-reconnaissance. But that is not enough to dispel completely the specter of a nuclear Sarajevo, which any instance of nuclear proliferation raises regardless of the momentary ideological coloration of the proliferator. What policies should those in the United States concerned about nuclear proliferation pursue in order to respond to the case of Israel?

The first imperative is not to follow in the long tradition of those, both in the administration and on Capitol Hill, who have routinely turned a blind eye toward this issue. The *Congressional Record* is littered with resolutions expressing concern and demanding action over the far less pronounced cases of proliferation in Pakistan, Taiwan, or South Africa. But

the words “Israel” and “nuclear proliferation” are seldom if ever uttered in the same breath in Congress.

The United States has produced a substantial body of legislation to constrain the actions of potential proliferators. But too often this legislation has been crafted in such a way as to spare Israel from its more draconian provisions. For example, in 1981 Congress strengthened those portions of the 1977 Glenn Amendment prohibiting U.S. assistance to any non-nuclear-weapon state that detonates a nuclear device, by explicitly barring a presidential waiver—but only beyond a 30-day *grace period*. Non-proliferation specialists have noted that this grace period would allow the United States to continue to assist Israel militarily for 30 days even after detonation of a nuclear weapon, and thus allow Israel to regain the military initiative whose loss, presumably, would have led to its resort to nuclear weapons in the first place.³⁹ But still, despite Congress’s extreme cleverness in framing its non-proliferation legislation to suit Israel’s needs, every so often Israel (like Pakistan) has slipped up, and an agent is caught red-handed somewhere in the United States breaking these laws. Does this affect the amount of aid that Congress votes to Pakistan? Yes, at least to some extent. To Israel? No. Such double standards make a mockery of the support the U.S. Senate gave to the NPT in 1969, and of its wisdom in dispensing our tax dollars.

For their part, White House officials have been apprised by their intelligence chiefs of the status of the Israeli program since at least the 1960s. How has this information affected presidential decision-making on Israel-related issues? Generally, as we have seen above, it seems to have served mainly to cow U.S. administrations into submission, confirming Francis Perrin’s point that Israel’s nuclear arsenal is aimed not just at the Arab states and the Soviet Union but at the United States as well. There is no reason for this continued submission, however. A president who is seriously committed to combating worldwide nuclear proliferation need not and cannot make exceptions for Israel. Instead, he or she should make clear to Israel—through a combination of private and public diplomatic initiatives—that the United States is committed to the existence and security of the state of Israel within internationally recognized borders but that it opposes any Israeli actions that undermine the NPT regime. Furthermore, the United States needs to acknowledge Israel’s already sizable nuclear military capability and make it clear that it will not allow itself to be cowed by this fact, reserving to itself the right to deal with this situation as it sees fit.

The virtue of adopting a clear posture such as this, and of making certain that it is communicated effectively to the Israelis, is that it would

enable the president to leap right off the horns of the doves' dilemma onto which the existing policy of hush-hush obfuscation, denial, and submission has hoisted all U.S. administrations over the past 20 years. It is a policy that could be successfully explained to a U.S. public wary of the dangers of global proliferation. And adopting a clearheaded policy such as this toward Israel's nuclear program would enable the president to advance along two other key diplomatic fronts: shoring up the global NPT regime, perhaps even making some provision for the orderly inclusion of a few new members in the nuclear-weapon states club; and establishing secure and stable borders for Israel.

Until now, successive Israeli governments have worked far harder at honing their nuclear arsenal than they have at seeking peace with their neighbors. And the United States has often felt itself deterred from trying to reverse this situation. It is not clear how long this U.S. stance of simultaneous permissiveness and submission can continue to serve U.S. interests. As the size, deadliness, and reach of the Israeli nuclear arsenal increase, so too will its political effects—especially in an environment in which the two superpowers are starting to destroy some of their nuclear weapons.

“These huge fortresses,” Steven Runciman wrote of the Crusader castles, “with their solid masonry, superbly situated on crags and mountain-tops, seemed impregnable in the days before gunpowder was known.” But his final judgment was that when such a castle fell it was usually for reasons that were not primarily technical, but social. “In spite of store-rooms and cisterns, famine and thirst were real dangers. The lack of man-power often meant that the defences could not be properly maintained. The kingdom often could not afford to send a relieving force, and that knowledge induced pessimism amongst the garrison. . . .”⁴⁰ In the end, then, factors of the Crusader kingdoms' social cohesion outweighed the impressive technical accomplishments of their military architects. Will the same judgment one day be passed on an Israel that is already torn by internal political strife and still disquietingly dependent on infusions of support from outside? Let us hope, instead, that future generations of tourists—Israelis, Arabs, and others—will one day be able to visit the sites of Israel's missile emplacements and marvel at their irrelevance to the reigning strategic harmony.

Notes

- ¹ T. E. Lawrence, *Crusader Castles* (London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1936), Vol. I, p. 45.
- ² Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951–54), Vol. III, p. 373.
- ³ “Revealed: the secrets of Israel’s nuclear arsenal,” *Sunday Times* (London), October 5, 1986, pp. 1, 2, and 3; “France admits it gave Israel A-bomb,” in *Sunday Times* (London), October 12, 1986, pp. 1 and 12. U.S. officials familiar with the issue have indicated that the true figure probably lies between 50 and 100 nuclear weapons. They stress that this does not change the implications of what Vanunu revealed.
- ⁴ William B. Quandt, *Decade of Decisions: American Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-76* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 67.
- ⁵ For the text of Vanunu’s indictment, see *Al-Fajr* English Weekly (Jerusalem), September 13, 1987. Four of Vanunu’s photographs are reproduced in Leonard S. Specter, *Going Nuclear* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 145–146.
- ⁶ Noteworthy treatments by Israeli authors include Shai Feldman, *Israeli Nuclear Deterrence: A Strategy for the 1980s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Yair Evron, “The relevance and irrelevance of nuclear options in conventional wars: the 1973 October War,” in *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 7, Nos. 1–2, pp. 143–176; Shlomo Aronson, “Alignment Likud nuclear option platforms analyzed,” in *Ha’aretz* (Tel Aviv), July 10, 1984, p. 9, and July 11, 1984, p. 9, as translated in *Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS)*, NEA-84-152, pp. 64–69; and several of the contributions in Louis René Beres, ed., *Security or Armageddon: Israel’s Nuclear Strategy* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1986).
- ⁷ Aronson (*ibid.*), p. 66 (*JPRS* pagination).
- ⁸ Evron (fn. 6), p. 148. The most advanced of these Arab efforts was probably Iraq’s. It was forestalled through Israel’s use of *conventional* military capabilities.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ¹⁰ “‘Text’ of Al-Assad’s *Al-Qabas* interview” on Damascus radio in Arabic, January 24, 1987 as translated in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service—Middle East (FBIS-ME)*, January 28, 1987, pp. H1-H2.
- ¹¹ Interview with Mustafa Tlas, Damascus, July 1987.
- ¹² When President Sadat, in his strange last frenzy of political paranoia, threw Heikal into jail in the fall of 1981, I was the bearer of a semi-secret message of support to the prisoner’s family from mutual friends in London.
- ¹³ Interview with Mohamed Heikal, Cairo, July 1987.
- ¹⁴ Robert Harkavy in Beres (fn. 6), p. 97.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- ¹⁶ Conversation with Michael McCwire, Washington, D.C., November 1987.
- ¹⁷ See *The Military Balance 1987-88* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1987), pp. 101–2, 202–5; *Jane’s All the World’s Aircraft 1970–71*, pp. 410–15, 449–51. “Ferry range” is the one-way range for an aircraft that takes off with only a minimal payload and arrives with fuel tanks empty. It is probably the most appropriate measure of range to use in the scenario of an Israeli decision to bomb the Soviet Union.
- ¹⁸ “Israel’s Jericho IRBM completes long range test,” in *International Defense Review* (Geneva), July 1987, p. 857.
- ¹⁹ For a thinly documented survey of Israeli–South African nuclear cooperation, see James Adams, *The Unnatural Alliance* (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1984), chapters 8–10. He deals with the most famous instance of this cooperation, the controver-

sial event of September 1979 that is widely thought to have been the detonation of an Israeli nuclear warhead from a South African naval flotilla in the Indian Ocean.

²⁰ See Vol. 19 of the Iranian students' series of reconstructed CIA files, minutes of: E. Weizman meeting with H. Toufanian (Tel Aviv, July 1977), p. 14; M. Dayan meeting with H. Toufanian (Tel Aviv, July 1977), p. 5; and meeting between Admirals Habibollahi and Barkal (Iran, June 1978), p. 2.

²¹ A full bibliography of these Soviet sources is published in Helena Cobban, ed., *Military Dimensions of Soviet Middle East Policy* (College Park, MD: Center for International Security Studies at Maryland, 1988).

²² "Jericho-2, Israeli position in Mideast discussed," on Moscow Radio Peace and Progress in Hebrew (MRPP-H), July 31, 1987, as translated in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service—Soviet Union (FBIS-SU)*, August 10, 1987, p. E3. MRPP-H has been the vehicle for a lot of Soviet signalling to Israelis on nuclear issues.

²³ "Jericho development following U.S. accord," on MRPP-H, September 21, 1987, as translated in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service—Soviet Union (FBIS-SU)*, September 22, 1987, p. 41.

²⁴ Igor Belyayev, "A bomb in the cellar," in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Moscow), October 30, 1985, p. 15, as translated in *Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS)*, UIA-86-006, p. 104.

²⁵ Robert Harkavy in Beres (fn. 6), p. 107.

²⁶ "Israel needs more U.S. aid to spur economy and immigration, economist says," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 20, 1987, pp. 9, 14.

²⁷ "How Israel got the bomb," *Time*, April 12, 1976, pp. 39-40.

²⁸ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), p. 491.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 492, 493.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 495. Sixteen days later Kissinger declared a U.S. nuclear alert over the Middle East issue. But that was aimed primarily at preventing a Soviet dispatch of truce supervision forces to Egypt and few writers have tried to link it with Israel's earlier nuclear moves.

³¹ William B. Quandt (fn. 4), p. 67.

³² "France admits. . . ." (fn. 3), p. 12.

³³ "Israel said to deploy improved Jericho missile," in *Aerospace Daily*, May 1, 1985, p. 5.

³⁴ Catherine M. Kelleher, "NATO nuclear operations," in Ashton Carter, John Steinbruner, and Charles Zraket, eds., *Managing Nuclear Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987), pp. 466-68.

³⁵ Robert Harkavy in Beres (fn. 6), p. 108.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

³⁷ See Yoram Peri, *Between Battles and Ballots: Israeli Military in Politics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 255-58.

³⁸ Anthony Cordesman in Rodney W. Jones, ed., *Small Nuclear Forces and U.S. Security Policy* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1984), p. 217.

³⁹ Conversations with Leonard Spector, May 1988. Spector noted that none of the major provisions of the 1976 Symington Amendment, the 1977 Glenn Amendment, or the 1985 Solarz Amendment were made retroactive, thus handily excluding most of the Israeli program from their purview.

⁴⁰ Steven Runciman (fn. 2).