

## Flux in the Middle East and Nuclear Israel

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### Abstract

*The article discusses the impact of policy and practice of Israel's nuclear opacity on the already volatile security environment of the region. Besides geographical rivalry that led to several Arab-Israel wars, the Israel nuclear opacity is a key cause of insecurity for other regional actors such as Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia. On contrary, there is a possibility that a nuclear Israel may increase the flux in an already unstable Middle East, along with a number of regional wars fought with the Arab states. It is important to note that Israel is considered as the main hurdle in establishing the Middle Eastern Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (MENWFZ) that could ensure security for the entire region. Moreover, important developments such as recognition of Israel by several Arab states have in recent past to normalise Arab-Israel relations raise a question – how the normalization of relations between Israel and Arab states may affect Israel's opacity regarding its possession of nuclear weapons. To explore this question, the article studies Israel's nuclear behaviour keeping in view the international non-proliferation initiatives and its stance towards nuclear weapons acquisition. The article draws*

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*empirical claim that if Israel chose to declare its nuclear status then this behavior may induce other states of the region to develop their nuclear weapon programme and thus multiplying the regional security challenges.*

**Keywords:** NPT, CTBT, FMCT, Non-proliferation, Nuclear weapons, Israel, Opacity, MENWFZ, RSC.

## **Introduction**

Israel maintains an ambiguous status of a nuclear-armed state as it has not overtly tested its nuclear device unlike India and Pakistan to declare its nuclear weapons programme. It is not recognized as NWS under the NPT unlike the US, Britain, France, China and Russia. Yet, it is considered a nuclear weapon state due to its nuclear programme infrastructure—uranium enrichment and reprocessing capabilities, refusal to join NPT as a NNWS and a clandestine test. Yet this assumption of nuclear testing about Israel is not widely accepted, as the flash over the Indian Ocean, away from the coastal area of South Africa is still inexplicable. The US suspects the flash to be a joint atomic test by Israel and South Africa.<sup>1</sup> Yet, it is not officially accepted by the state of Israel; therefore, no primary source can verify this claim. According to a report, Israel “is generally suspected of having a nuclear arsenal ranging from 100 to 200 nuclear warheads.”<sup>2</sup> Geographically situated in an unstable and conflict-prone region of Middle East,

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<sup>1</sup> Yossi Melman, “US Suspected Israeli-South African Nuclear Test Behind Mysterious “Flash”,” *The Jerusalem Post*, December 8, 2016, accessed June 8, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/US-suspected-Israeli-South-African-nuclear-test-474765>

<sup>2</sup> “Arms Control and Proliferation Profile: Israel,” *Arms Control Association*, July, 2013, accessed January 6, 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/israelprofile>

Israel has been sustaining its nuclear weapons programme under secrecy with hardly any substantial evidence before 1986. Since 1948, the country fought several wars with its Arab neighbours and has been experiencing troubled relations with its neighbours since its inception. However, in recent years Arab countries such as Bahrain and the UAE have agreed to build normal diplomatic relations with Israel that will help in easing off Israel's isolation in the region. Other states are still reluctant to normalize their relations. There are news reports, which are officially denied,<sup>3</sup> about Israeli Prime Minister's meeting with Saudi prince indicating the possibility of building diplomatic relations covertly.

Given the strained regional dynamics, the article argues that it is imperative for Israel to maintain its nuclear weapons programme under secrecy because if Israel reveals possession of nuclear weapons, it would destabilize the region and lead to a nuclear arms race. Currently, Israel has no peer/competitor in the region in terms of nuclear technology but future prospects can be different because Israel's nuclear weapons may create a security dilemma for the other regional states to develop their nuclear weapons to ensure their security. Although during the last five decades these weapons have not led to horizontal proliferation, the recognition of Israel as a state by some regional states will likely create security dilemma for other rival states especially Iran. Iran has pointed out Israeli threat in its 2013 United Nations Security Council (UNSC) address.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Israel expressed its reservations about Iranian nuclear programme. Thus the argument this article puts forth is

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<sup>3</sup> Ben Hubbard, David M. Halbfinger and Ronen Bergman, "Israeli Reports Say Netanyahu Met Saudi Crown Prince. Saudis Deny It," *The New York Times*, November 23, 2020, accessed November 26, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/23/world/middleeast/netanyahu-mohammed-bin-salman.html>

<sup>4</sup> "Netanyahu Speech at UN in 3 Minutes," *The New York Times*, October 1, 2013, accessed November 22, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsG88a6IPI0>

that any revelation of Israel's nuclear weapons programme could create security dilemma for Iran.

The recent developments such as two Arab states' recognizing Israel can bring change in latter's nuclear policy however, this article is focused on the possibilities and prospects of Israel's decision to sustain its opacity. Israel's policy is "that it will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East."<sup>5</sup> Yet, the NPT failed to establish the Middle East as a nuclear weapons/WMD free-zone<sup>6</sup> and Israel is the main hurdle despite the fact that it participated in NPT Review Conference's negotiations. Israel's behaviour is complicating the security environment of the region which can be explained through Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). According to this theory it is not the region but the multifaceted relationships between the regional actors which need to be determined.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the regional actors are already in a volatile relationship with each other and if one state increases its power (by acquiring nuclear weapons), it will further complicate regional security.

The article attempts to assess how Israel's nuclear weapons and its nuclear behaviour has aggravated regional insecurities. The descriptive research design of the study delves into the problem, its causes and prospects in detail. The Middle Eastern region is already volatile due to terrorism concerns and Israel's influence on the great power politics is further complicating regional security

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," Draft Final Document, Distr.: Restricted, *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*, May 21, 2015, accessed June 10, 2020, <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/documents/Disarmamentfora/npt/revcon2015/documents/DraftFinalDocument.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Barry Buzan & Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 564.

dynamics. Neo-Realism argues that the “relative distribution of power in the International system is the key to determine the independent variables for understanding important international endings such as war, alliances, peace, politics and balance of power.”<sup>8</sup> In this anarchic world, structure of the system creates insecurity; hence, states prefer reliance on the self-help system. This argument proves that nuclear Israel may cause insecurity for the other regional actors among which Iran is a potential threat and the international community led by the US considers Iran to have suspicious motives to acquire nuclear weapons.

In order to assess the impact of Israel’s nuclear weapons programmes and its nuclear behaviour on regional security, this article seeks answers to following questions: 1) how did Middle Eastern geo-political environment evolve with the advent of nuclear weapons?; 2) why has Israel decided to acquire nuclear weapons?; 3) why Israel’s *nuclear opacity* policy was introduced?; and 4) how has Israel’s nuclear behaviour and its posture towards nuclear non-proliferation evolved?

### **The Geo-Political Environment of Israel**

Since 1948, Israel has been facing an intense geo-political environment that led to several Arab-Israel wars. In 1949, the borders were declared to be insecure and indefensible for the state of Israel; particularly Golan Height in the northeast, which was under Syrian control and the barrier in the north. The state of Israel is not recognized by the majority of the Arab states. Faced with intense regional rivalry, Israel with a small territorial possession and lack of strategic depth opted for nuclear weapons – a tool to be

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<sup>8</sup> John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens, *The Globalization of World Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 92.

used in order to attain security and its foreign policy goals.<sup>9</sup> However, the possession of (undeclared) nuclear weapons by Israel and regional rivalry are also threatening other states' security in the region. Israel is considered to be an aggressor state by the Muslim world due to its forced occupation of Palestine and utilization of unjust techniques to violate the due rights of the people of Palestine; Israel and Palestine have remained and still are in a state of flux for a number of years. Regardless of Israel's policies and posture towards neighbouring states, Israel's quest for nuclear weapons was not as opposed by the non-proliferation supporters as it is, in case of Iran. The reason being Israel is a non-NPT state. But, it is also believed by the scholars that Israel proliferated and acquired nuclear weapons with the help of the US, Britain, France and Canada.<sup>10</sup> All these states under the NPT statutes were not allowed to transfer nuclear weapons technology to non-nuclear weapons state under the Article-I of NPT.<sup>11</sup> Although the

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<sup>9</sup> Main techniques of Israel for attaining the goals of its foreign policy is evidenced by a number of historical examples such as: Israel's concern about "British withdrawal from its Suez Canal base, in accordance with the Anglo-Egyptian treaty 1954, the opportunity of an Egyptian-American reconciliation under this consideration Israel conducted a covert operation (Operation Susannah) to damage these alarming developments." See Bennett, Jeremy, *The Suez Crisis*. BBC Video, n.d. Video cassette (Check this reference) and Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, *Every Spy a Prince, The Complete History of Israel's Intelligence Community* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990): 63-69.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Waltz, "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better," *Adelphi Papers*, Number 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981): 43.

<sup>11</sup> Fact Sheet: Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)," *Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation*, updated April 14, 2017, accessed August 10, 2020, <https://armscontrolcenter.org/fact-sheet-nuclear-non-proliferation-treaty-npt/>; Daryle Kimball and Kelsey Davenport, "The Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) at a Glance," Fact Sheets and Briefs, *Arms Control Association*, updated August 2017, accessed August 10, 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/NSG>; Kelsey Davenport, "The Missile Technology Control Regime at a Glance," Fact Sheets and Briefs, *Arms Control Association*, updated July 2017, accessed August 10, 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/mtcr>

technology was acquired under the cover of civilian/peaceful nuclear technological agreements.

In order to assess geo-political environment confronted by Israel, it is important to study the Palestinian/Arab point of view about Israel as an aggressor state. This should be seen in comparison with the US and Israel's belief that Israel needs protection for sustaining its identity and existence. Israel fought at least one major war in every decade since 1948 – “the 1956 Suez war in the 1950s, the 1967 Six-Day war and the 1969-1970 war of attrition in the 1960s, the 1973 war in the 1970s and finally, the 1982 war with Lebanon in the subsequent two decades.”<sup>12</sup> Resultantly, Israel occupied Palestinian territory for religious reasons that left Israel isolated in the region. Besides political and religious reasons for going to war with its Arab neighbours, the key insecurity for Israeli planners (especially from military viewpoint) emanates from country's lack of strategic depth. In 1948, Ben-Gurion proposed a way to resolve the concerns of lack of strategic depth by transferring “war into the enemy territories.”<sup>13</sup> The military and political elite of Israel developed an offensive military doctrine. This solution is relatable and convincing for the Israelis but equally destructive and volatile for the Middle Eastern security calculus.

In 1967, after the six-days war, Israel refused to withdraw from the occupied territories and claimed that those territories are significant for the security of Israel. This denotes the hegemonic

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<sup>12</sup> Amr Nasr El-Din, “Israeli Nuclear Deterrence: The Failure of a Concept: How did the Change in Israel's Strategic Context Affect the Usefulness,” *American University in Cairo*, October 21, 2012, accessed August 4, 2020, <http://dar.aucegypt.edu/handle/10526/3276>

<sup>13</sup> Zeynep Civik, “The Israeli Security Policy: Changes and Continuities,” *Masters of Science, Middle East Technical University*, December 2004, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12605756/index.pdf>

intention of Israel and indicates that Israel was not dependent on nuclear weapons to counter its challenges. This argument for a self-evident conclusion revealed that Israel's conventional capabilities remained adequate to counter regional states. Therefore, possession of nuclear weapons although claimed to be for the sake of security, was more of an issue of prestige than security. In that case Israel will utilize every situation to fulfil its hegemonic motives. A counter argument can be that the fewer the enemies Israel has in the region, lesser the pressure it would feel to become a nuclear power. Keeping in view the previously discussed argument, Israel consider nuclear weapons a matter of prestige and thus normalization of relationship with the Arab states will provide Israel a chance to enhance its prestige. These hegemonic designs of Israel are affecting security of the region.

### **Nuclear Weapons Programme of Israel**

Israel started its nuclear programme in 1948 when many talented Jewish scientists immigrated to Israel in the early 30s and 40s. In 1949 the Weizmann Institute of Science supported the nuclear programme "with Dr. Bergmann heading the chemistry department, this programme offered many scholarships to Israeli students to study nuclear engineering and technology."<sup>14</sup> The civilian division of atomic energy was founded secretly in 1952 and was placed under the Ministry of Defence. A French scientist Dr Francis Perrin visited Weizmann Institute in 1949 later revealed in 1986 that there were many Israeli scientists working at Los Alamos national laboratory who "may have brought the technology at home [Israel]. Israel and France had vital cooperation while enhancing and developing the nuclear technology. In constructing G-1 plutonium reactor and UP-1 production reprocessing plant at

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 223.



Marcoule (France).”<sup>15</sup> Israel and France enjoyed close cordial relations during early 1950s and 60s when Israel provided intelligence to France about French colonies in the Middle East. The rivalry with Egypt was one of the reasons for the alliance/partnership of France and Israel. During the six days before the Suez Canal crisis, Israel convinced France to help build its nuclear reactor; Canada also participated in helping Israel.<sup>16</sup>

The Suez crisis undoubtedly alarmed Israel against the Soviet threat. As a result, Golda Meir (the then Foreign Minister of Israel), Shimon Peres (the Israeli Defence Minister) and Christian Pineau (French Foreign Minister) had a secret meeting and France found Israel as an ally against Egypt.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Israel needed assistance for acquiring nuclear technology and in the meeting Peres convinced the French to assist Israel in acquiring nuclear deterrent. After several meetings between the foreign ministers of both countries “the agreement was reached for an 18-megawatt thermal research reactor of EL3 type. Both countries signed the agreement in 1957.”<sup>18</sup>

During the 1967 war, France stopped uranium supply to Israel however it did not stop Israel from developing its nuclear programme. French colonies such as Gibbon, Niger and Central

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<sup>15</sup> Shlomo Aronson and Oded Brosh, *The Politics and Strategy of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East, the Opacity Theory, and Reality* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992): 20.

<sup>16</sup> Zachary Keck, “The inside Story of How Israel Build Nuclear Weapons,” *The National Interest*, April 4, 2018, accessed June 10, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/the-inside-story-how-israel-built-nuclear-weapons-25210>

<sup>17</sup> Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars: A history of Israel's Intelligence Services* (New York, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991): 418-419.

<sup>18</sup> William Burr and Avner Cohen, “The US Discovery of Israel’s Secret Nuclear Project,” *Nuclear Proliferation International History Project*, April 2015, accessed June 12, 2020, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-us-discovery-israels-secret-nuclear-project>

African Republic were utilized for the uranium supply. The Operation Yellow Cake helped obtain uranium oxide held in a stock pile in Antwerp. In Operation Yellow Cake, Israel used “West German front company and high seas transfer in the Mediterranean Sea from one ship to another. Smugglers named the 560 sealed oil drums as plumbat, from which it received the name ‘Operation Plumbat’.”<sup>19</sup> This nuclear quest shows Israel’s commitment towards nuclear weapons acquisition however Israel from the very beginning has the policy of opacity about its nuclear weapons.

Although Israel has not officially tested its nuclear device, empirical evidence indicates that it had mastered the nuclear weapons technology by the late 1960s due to the close collaboration with countries like France, South Africa, the UK and the US and possesses sufficient nuclear weapons,<sup>20</sup> which is now widely accepted as well.<sup>21</sup> Notably, it was in October 1986, the (British Newspaper) *Sunday Times* provided pictures as well as evidence regarding Israel’s implicit nuclear program, citing the worker/nuclear technician named Mordechai Vanunu, who was working in the top-secret nuclear reactor Dimona complex, as its source.<sup>22</sup> The revelations were precise and comprehensive, for the first time providing verifiable proof that made it difficult for Israel to continue claiming not having nuclear weapons. The consequence of that revelation was an eruption of academic work examining the

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<sup>19</sup> Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 16.

<sup>20</sup> Hans M. Kristensen, Robert S. Norris, “Israeli Nuclear Weapons,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 70: Issue 6 (November 2015): 97-115.

<sup>21</sup> Louis R. Beres, “Israel’s Bomb in the Basement: A revisiting of ‘Deliberate Ambiguity’ vs. Disclosure,” in Karsh, *Between War and Peace*, 113-133.

<sup>22</sup> Greg Myre, “Israeli Who Revealed Nuclear Secrets is Freed,” *The New York Times*, April 2014.

consistency of Israel's stance and options available for Israel's nuclear program.<sup>23</sup>

The available information on Israel's stockpile of fissile material and its production is minimal. According to a report published in 2014, almost 800 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium was possessed by Israel and roughly 300 kilograms of HEU stockpiles were reported with less certainty due to the lack of information.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the Global Fissile Material Report of 2015 indicates that Israel is producing weapon grade plutonium through Dimona (50 years old) which is a plutonium production reactor built by France. The reactor is estimated to solely producing Lithium-6 and Tritium at this point.<sup>25</sup> According to some reports, Israel has 860 kg of plutonium capable of producing nuclear weapons.<sup>26</sup> The reports indicate that in 2016, the HEU stockpile of Israel was about 300 kg with the apprehension that this stockpile may have been supported by the US in 1960s, but certainly was not overtly acknowledged by either government.<sup>27</sup> Israel reportedly possesses 80 nuclear weapons and among these, 50 nuclear weapons are for the Jericho II medium-range ballistic missiles, which are supposed to be situated in caves along with the mobile launchers at Jerusalem's

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<sup>23</sup> Alan Dowty, "Nuclear Proliferation: The Israeli Case," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 22: No. 1 (March, 1978): 79-120; Efraim Karsh (ed.), *Between War and Peace: Dilemmas of Israeli Security* (London, England: Frank Cass, 1996): 82-90.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Daryl G. Kimball, "Israel Indicates Support for CTBT," *Arms Control Association*, May 2014, accessed September 20, 2020, [https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2014\\_05/Israel-Indicates-Support-for-CTBT](https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2014_05/Israel-Indicates-Support-for-CTBT); Mounzer Sleiman, "Shutting down Dimona: Israel's nuclear programme, arsenal and environmental threat," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* Vol. 3: Issue 4 (November 2010): 437-479.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "Arms Control and Proliferation Profile: Israel," Fact Sheets and Briefs.

eastern military base, and almost 30 are gravity bombs for delivery by aircraft.<sup>28</sup>

### Israel's Delivery Systems

Israel possesses the capacity of having delivery means with the capability to carry a nuclear payload and is capable to attack any regional state.<sup>29</sup> Reports further specify that Israel has achieved the nuclear triad with the capacity to deliver nuclear warheads.<sup>30</sup> Israel developed land-based Jericho ballistic missiles – Jericho I, II and III. These missiles are road and rail mobile based on a technology provided by France. Jericho-I was a short-range missile with a 500 kilometres range, deployed in the 1970s but later became obsolete and retired from service in 1990s. Jericho II with 1,500 kilometres range was launched in 1980s and can cover all the Arab states.<sup>31</sup> Jericho-III with estimated range of 4,800-6500 kilometres entered into service in 2011. Reports indicate that Jericho-III was first tested in 2008 and later in 2011 and, is categorized as an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

The available information on Israel's Submarine-Launched Cruise Missiles (SLCMs) and submarines is negligible and ambiguous. There are doubts regarding Israel's capability to launch

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<sup>28</sup> Shannon N. Kile and Hans M. Kristensen, *SIPRI Fact Sheet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, July 2017), accessed August 3, 2020, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2017-06/fs\\_1707\\_wnf.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2017-06/fs_1707_wnf.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> In 1981, Iraqi reactor was bombed by the Israeli Air Force, which was perceived as a threat by the Israel government. Likewise, in 2007, when the Syrians failed to provide accurate information about their reactor to the IAEA, Israeli Air Force again launched an air strike on the Syrian reactor. Moreover, Israeli government officially threatened Iran government about attacking Iranian facilities in order to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Ian Black, "Israeli threat to attack Iran over nuclear weapons," *The Guardian*, June 7, 2007, accessed June 13, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/jun/07/israelandthepalestinians.iran>

<sup>30</sup> Fetter, *Ballistic Missiles and Weapons of Mass Destruction*.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *Peace and War: The Arab-Israeli Military Balance Enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: Library of Congress, 2002): 521.

sea-based nuclear weapons, yet it is widely believed that Israel has this capability. The three Dolphin-class nuclear submarines were launched in the early 2000s, which were acquired from Germany for Israel's Navy. Recent reports illustrate that Israeli Navy will deploy more Dolphin-class submarines soon. It was announced in April 2017 that the progress of the submarine deal will accelerate.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, Israel is believed to have retro-fitted the vessels of the Dolphin-class and indigenously developed a dual-capable system of SLCM with approximately 1,500 kilometres range. Regarding the capability of these missiles as delivery means for nuclear weapons, the German company ThyssenKrupp announced that it is not allowed to retrofit the submarine with the nuclear-armed SLCMs for Israel.<sup>33</sup> The reports of British paper *Sunday Times* specified that off the Sri Lankan coast in June 2000, Israel tested its nuclear version of this missile; however, these reports were denied by the Israeli government.<sup>34</sup> Some reports also claim that Israel's SLCM in question is an advanced version of the Harpoon (anti-ship cruise missile), which was either supplied by the US, or was an air-launched Popeye Turbo Israeli missile.<sup>35</sup>

There is very little information available about strategic bombers and air-based nuclear forces of Israel. According to some estimates, Israel possesses 30 nuclear gravity bombs that can be

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<sup>32</sup> Barbara Opall-Rome, "Israeli Navy backs Netanyahu's submarine scheme," April 19, 2017, accessed September 20, 2020, <https://www.defencenews.com/naval/2017/04/19/israeli-navy-backs-netanyahus-submarine-scheme/>

<sup>33</sup> Josh Breiner and Amos Harel, "Israel's Submarine Affair: Tale That Goes From Netanyahu to Gas Fields to Iran," Haaretz, November 9, 2018, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-s-submarine-affair-a-tale-of-bibi-gas-fields-germany-and-iran-1.6636630;>

ThyssenKrupp was responsible for the construction of the Israeli submarine.

<sup>34</sup> *Arms Control and Proliferation Profile: Israel*, Arms Control Association.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

transported by aircraft.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, more than twenty F-15 Eagle and F-16 Falcon aircrafts are operated by the Israeli air force out of which some are believed to be specialized to deliver nuclear payload.<sup>37</sup>

Table 3.1. Israel Missile Account

Missile	Range	Status
Jericho III	4800-6500	Operational
Jericho II	1500-3500	Operational
Jericho I	500	Obsolete
Lora	280	Operational
Gabriel	35-400	Operational
Delilah	250-300	Operational
Harpoon	90-240	Operational

Source: “Missiles of Israel,” Missile Threat, CSIS Missile Defence Project.<sup>38</sup>

### Israel’s Nuclear Policy

The broad contours of Israel’s nuclear policy can be understood from different officials’ statements. For instance, in 1968 the Israeli ambassador to the US, Yitzhak Rabin, said that “he would not consider a weapon to be a weapon until it is tested.”<sup>39</sup> Later in 1974, President Ephraim Katzir stated that “it has always been our intention to develop a nuclear potential...we now have that potential.”<sup>40</sup> According to Israel’s doctrine, the Samson Resort,

<sup>36</sup> Kile and Kristensen, *SIPRI Fact Sheet*.

<sup>37</sup> Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, “Israeli Nuclear Weapons, 2014,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* Vol. 70: No.6 (2014): 97-115.

<sup>38</sup> Missiles of Israel, “Missile Defence Project, Missile Threat, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, published June 14, 2018, last modified June 15, 2018, accessed August 5, 2018, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/india/>

<sup>39</sup> Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, “Israeli Nuclear Weapons,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (October 13, 2016), accessed July 13, 2020, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0096340214555409>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Israel will use nuclear weapons in crisis which poses threat to the very identity and acceptance of the state of Israel. It happened somewhere in the war of Yom e Kippur where Israel was willing to use nuclear weapons but did not use them due to the US pressure.<sup>41</sup> Cohen identifies that Israel restrained itself once it was able to repulse Syrian advances in the Golan Heights and demonstration of detonation was considered as a warning, not actual use against Arab forces or cities. Israel's will to use nuclear weapons in case of a threat to its recognition as a state of Israel can be reviewed in changing regional political dynamics wherein two Arab states (Bahrain and the UAE) have recognized Israel thus setting the pace for ending Israel's isolation in future. Given the regional security dynamics and (growing) Arab-Israel rivalry and between few Arab states and Iran, a declared nuclear Israel could either aggravate tensions in the region or act as a strong deterrent to Iranian aggression against both Israel and its five Arab allies.

Israel's claim, that the decision to opt for nuclear weapons was based on providing a decisive deterrent and "the quest for nuclear capability was prompted by the basic asymmetries, in terms of population resources, strategic depth, territory and other attributes of power, between Israel and the Arab world,"<sup>42</sup> needs a reconsideration. One can argue the relevance of Israel's assumption for acquiring nuclear deterrence in the absence of any nuclear weapons in the region. Nonetheless, the dynamics of deterrence need to be explored within the broader paradigm in Middle East. For instance, Israel is stronger than Palestine due to its influence in the international system, despite being the major

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<sup>41</sup> Shmuel Tzabag, "Termination of the Yom Kippur War between Israel and Syria: Positions, Decisions and Constraints at Israel's Ministerial Level," *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 37: No. 4 (October 2001): 182-205.

<sup>42</sup> Sharad Joshi, "Israel's Nuclear Policy: A Cost-Benefit Analysis," *Strategic Analysis* (2000), accessed August 2, 2020, <https://www.idsa-india.org/an-mar00-6.html>

human rights violator. Israel claims that Arabs' threat since 1948 has created a dilemma for the state that made it necessary for Israel to acquire nuclear weapons as a guarantee for its security. Israel wanted to increase the cost for Arab states to refrain from the war. Unfortunately, this high response from Israel to a conventional threat introduced nuclear weapons in the region, although theorists believe that "states act with less care if the expected costs of war are low and with more care if they are high,"<sup>43</sup> and thus, Israel needs to be conscious regarding its nuclear policy. Few Arab states have formed diplomatic and trade relations with Israel which made other states further insecure who already had reservation against Israel. Hence, this dilemma could trigger a high response from these states. Therefore, within the context of Middle Eastern region it is argued that nuclear weapons may play a significant role in making the region more volatile.

### **Nuclear Behaviour of Israel**

Israel consistently maintains its long-standing policy of 'nuclear opacity,' keeping its nuclear posture restricted to an equilibrate viewpoint that appeals for restraint and caution. The Holocaust is a crucial element in understanding Israel's nuclear resolve. Israel believes that it needs to build its potential for inflicting the terror of nuclear war like that of Hiroshima against its enemy. It believes that in order to prevent another Auschwitz Camp (where millions of Jews were killed by Nazis); there is a need to build nuclear weapons.<sup>44</sup> The geographical vulnerabilities of Israel depict that an attack like Hiroshima might be considered as another holocaust for the population of Israel, therefore, another Auschwitz was unthinkable for the Israeli nation. However, this logic does not

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<sup>43</sup> Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*. 54.

<sup>44</sup> Martin van Creveld, *The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defence Force* (New York, New York: Public Affairs, 1998): 174.



provide ground for Israel to create a holocaust for the Palestinians and rest of the region.

Besides Israel's nuclear opacity, international community showed little concern to address this issue. The 1986 Mordechai Vanunu's revelations about Israel's nuclear programme followed by limited political reaction by major states indicated international community's lack of political interest in interfering in Israel's nuclear affairs. Norway, however, was the sole exception, where the government was forced by the opposition to take action and 'slowed if not stopped'<sup>45</sup> the heavy water export, which in the late 1950s was supplied to Israel. Otherwise, no significant official political reaction was observed after the Vanunu's report especially from the Western governments. Even the Arab's official reaction was relatively muted.<sup>46</sup> But the consideration of the Arab world cannot be ignored and consequently reports of Iran's nuclear ambitions were evident to prove that it increased the complications for the region.

### ***Amimut (Nuclear Opacity)***<sup>47</sup>

Secrecy and lack of acknowledgment are the key ingredients in the amimut policy of Israel. It has been in Israel's interest to make sure that nuclear weapons are not introduced into the Middle East<sup>48</sup> hence to keep its nuclear programme under secrecy and undeclared. However, the changing security and political dynamics of Middle East could compel other states to develop nuclear

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<sup>45</sup> Gary Milhollin, "Israeli A-Bombs and Norwegian Heavy Water: Arms Control through Public Pressure," *Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control*, June 17, 1993, accessed July 17, 2020, <https://www.wisconsinproject.org/israeli-a-bombs-and-norwegian-heavy-water-arms-control-through-public-pressure/>

<sup>46</sup> Cohen, *The Worst Kept Secret*, 48.

<sup>47</sup> The Hebrew word for nuclear opacity or ambiguity is amimut. The term used by Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*.

<sup>48</sup> Cohen, *The Worst Kept Secret*, 34.

weapons to ensure their security which would in turn make Israel more insecure. Once the Arab-Israeli conflict is elevated to the nuclear level, Israel's security predicament would quickly worsen.<sup>49</sup> According to Avner Cohen, instead of choosing between resolve (proliferation) and caution (non-proliferation), Israel has adopted a posture that incorporates both. Although senior officials have made the point, always off the record, that the continuity of amimut is not automatic; it is not a dogma that can be taken for granted.<sup>50</sup> Rather, amimut is a policy that the Israeli government reviews occasionally, based on international developments. But each of these reviews has concluded that this policy is still the best response to Israel's nuclear situation, still future is uncertain.

Israel's position on nuclear affairs is quite different than that of India and Pakistan (non-NPT nuclear states). Israel maintains its ambivalent position about nuclear weapons. India's abandonment of opacity was motivated by nationalistic ideology and its desire for great-power status and Pakistan's abandonment of opacity was in response to India's nuclear test. For Israel, however, such a step can be predicted in the future. Israel's policy of nuclear opacity worked in the past, but this needs to be revised keeping in view changing dynamics of the nuclear club and region.

### ***Israel and the non-Proliferation Treaties***

The US provided Israel a great deal of diplomatic cover under the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. This argument was articulated for the first time in the early 1960s, soon after the nuclear project had become known, by the leaders of the Achdut Ha'avodah Party, Israel Galili and Yigal Allon, as well as by a small group of antinuclear Israeli scientists and intellectuals. Their basic argument was that if Israel was to initiate a nuclear-weapon project, it would inevitably lead to similar nuclear-weapons projects on the Arab side in reaction, which would make Israel's security drastically worse.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Nixon-Meir deal<sup>51</sup> and many western and non-western states have been persuaded to treat Israel as an exceptional case. According to some experts, Israel's reason for not being part of NPT is due to treaty's ineffectiveness<sup>52</sup> as some regional countries such as Iran, that joined the NPT, could not be deterred from acquiring nuclear weapons. Israel has taken a different path altogether: while it has left little doubt about its nuclear resolve, it has remained reluctant to disclose its nuclear weapons, because for Israel it is not a national priority to declare its nuclear weapons rather nuclear weapons are its shield against the rival Arab states.<sup>53</sup>

With regards to the CTBT, Israel is the signatory, however, just like the US, it did not ratify the treaty. Israel maintains that it hasn't tested its nuclear weapons, and hence by signing CTBT the chances for future testing would be nullified. Although Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the CTBTO in 2016, after his visit to Israel, announced that Israel is quite positive regarding the ratification of CTBT and there are chances of ratification among the eight countries having nuclear weapon technology.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, Israel has two fully operational seismic stations and a radionuclide laboratory; and is among those 90 countries which host the CTBTO monitoring stations. Yet after discourse analysis, the possibility of Israel ratifying the CTBT any time soon seems very remote, because states give statements in order to gain positive image on media and

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<sup>51</sup> Amir Oren, "Newly Declassified Documents Reveal How U.S. Agreed to Israel's Nuclear Program," *Haaretz*, August 30, 2014, accessed August 15, 2018. <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-how-the-u-s-let-israel-go-nuclear-1.5262274>

<sup>52</sup> Chen Kane (Director, Middle East Nonproliferation Program, Middlebury Institute), interviewed by the researcher, Washington DC, September 10, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Yossi Melman, "Nuclear Official to "Post": Israel will Ratify CTBT," *The Jerusalem Post*, June 20, 2016, accessed June 3, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Nuclear-official-to-Post-Israel-will-ratify-CTBT-457287>

among the other actors, but it does not mean that they comply with those positive statements. For instance, Lassina Zebro's (Executive Secretary of the CTBTO) statement is not the policy of Israel, he believes that "Israel could be the next" state among the eight key holdouts to ratify the treaty."<sup>55</sup>

Israel participated in the Conference on Disarmament (CD), before the Iran deal, and objected to the fissile material cut-off Treaty (FMCT) negotiations, arguing that it needs sufficient nuclear material to safeguard from the suspected development of nuclear weapons by Iran. In the CD 2012, Israel didn't discuss the FMCT and insisted to focus on other issues rather than the four core issues that are in a stalemate: negative security assurances, the FMCT, nuclear disarmament, and prevention of an arms race in the outer space. Israel has always opposed the FMCT as it will directly impact its nuclear policy of *opacity*.<sup>56</sup> Israel also believed that it will not be an effective measure against the regional nuclear proliferation and considered it an inadequate safeguard against the Iranian nuclear development capability. Therefore, Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu continually refused to sign the FMCT.<sup>57</sup> However, despite having concerns, Israel didn't block the negotiations on the FMCT. Yet, in 2015 in the UNGA, Israel refrained from a consensus resolution urging the CD to start the FMCT negotiations.

### ***The US and Nuclear Israel***

Many Israeli nuclear scientists received nuclear training and technological assistance under Eisenhower's *Atoms for Peace*

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<sup>55</sup> David Horowitz, "Israel "probably" next to ratify nuke test ban treaty- top official," *The Times of Israel*, March 19, 2014.

<sup>56</sup> "WMD-Free Middle East Proposal at a Glance," Fact Sheets and Briefs, *Arms Control Association*, June 2015, accessed January 10, 2020, [www.armscontrol.org](http://www.armscontrol.org)

<sup>57</sup> "Israel Banning the Production of Fissile Material for Nuclear Weapons: Country Perspectives on the Challenge to Fissile Material (Cutoff) Treaty," *Global Fissile Report 2008*, accessed January 10, 2020, [www.fissilematerials.org](http://www.fissilematerials.org)

programme and utilized the supplied materials for weapon development purposes. The NPT in 1968 created a rift between US-Israel relations on the nuclear issue. Some analysts believe that till the 1969 deal,<sup>58</sup> the nuclear programme of Israel remained a source of frustration and friction between the US and Israel. The deal though allowed the US to accept the nuclear-armed Israel and restricted Israel to keep its part of the deal. Israel gave the US assurances of commitment about its nuclear conduct – no test, no declaration, no transfer to others (Western and non-Western states alike) – with the belief that the world can live with an Israeli bomb that is kept invisible.

While the details of the Nixon-Meir agreement<sup>59</sup> remained confidential for many years, the United States defended Israel's nuclear programme in the international arena. Egypt started peace negotiations with Israel in 1977 under the shadow of Israel's bomb. It was the United States during the Camp David phase of negotiations that told Egypt straightforwardly that any effort to introduce nuclear issues into the peace negotiations, particularly Egypt's demand for Israel to join the NPT, would be futile. Egypt thus abandoned the efforts.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, nuclear weapons always remained non-negotiable and classified for Israel. The only time that the US has challenged Israel on a nuclear issue was in the context of the American global effort to advance the FMCT.<sup>61</sup> The collaboration between the US and Israel increased under Trump administration thus provided Israel an opportunity to reconsider its nuclear posture.

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<sup>58</sup> Amir Oren, "Newly Declassified Documents Reveal How U.S. Agreed to Israel's Nuclear Program."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Cited in Cohen, *The Worst Kept Secret*, 49.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 54.

## The Debate on the Middle East NWFZ and Israel

The idea of Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone was first taken up by an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) technical study in 1989,<sup>62</sup> which established the geographical delimitation of a future Middle East NWFZ. It was proposed to include the region extending from Syria in the north to Yemen in the south and from Libya in the west to Iran in the east in this MENWFZ. Furthermore, the UN study expanded the span by including Israel, Iran and all the League of Arab states. This UN study delimitation was endorsed by the Arab League, to which even Israel did not raise any objection.<sup>63</sup> Yet, Israel is the only state in the region possessing nuclear weapons. The discourse analysis of the debate indicates Israel is the only hurdle in the way of the Middle East NWFZ.

In 1995, the debate on Middle East NWFZ or Weapon of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ) remained an integral part of the NPT Review Conference (Rev Con) when the decision was made to extend NPT for an indefinite period. Furthermore, in the 2010 NPT Rev Con, the states decided to establish such a zone by 2012, but this meeting was suspended due to the disagreement on the agenda. Later, in 2012, Israel contributed in a series of discussions with the Arab Group and Finnish coordinator Jaakko Laajava. This discussion, however, was halted after the 2015 Rev Con, which failed to produce a final document to extend Laajava's mandate (WMDFZ).<sup>64</sup> Israel announced in the UNGA that "it remains

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<sup>62</sup> Sameh Aboul-Enein and Hassan El-Bahtimy, "Towards a verified nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East," *Vertic Brief*, April 11, 2010, accessed April 10, 2020, <http://www.vertic.org/media/assets/Publications/VB11.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Paolo Foradori and Martin B. Malin (ed.), "A WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East: Regional Perspectives," The Project on Managing the Atom, *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, November 2013, accessed October 10, 2019, <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/awmdfreezoninthemiddleeast.pdf>

committed to a vision of the Middle East developing eventually into a zone free of Chemical, Biological, and Nuclear weapons as well as ballistic missiles.”<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, it similarly recognizes the need for direct negotiations between the regional states and the directly concerned states while applying step by step approach to freely arrive at some agreed upon arrangements.<sup>66</sup>

### **Israel’s Emerging Status and Nuclear Weapons**

In the recent scenario, recognition of the state of Israel by Arab states especially, Bahrain and the UAE, and its growing influence in the region due to the US support is considered to be its political/diplomatic success. These Arab states were united on this issue for several decades and the punitive action was taken against the Egypt in 1979 when it recognized Israel. But the current the stance of Arab states has been changed which will obviously affect the region. Conscious that it had played pivotal role in the Middle Eastern Politics, Israel aspired to claim its place as one of the significant players in the region. Therefore, there are possibilities that Israel after getting recognition may rethink its nuclear posture and which may be detrimental for the regional peace and security.

### **Conclusion**

Israel never admitted to possessing nuclear weapons nor is it a party to the NPT. The official stance of Israel remained that “it will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Director General, “Application of IAEA Safeguards in the Middle East Report,” GOV/2012/38-GC(56)/17, *Board of Governors General Conference*, August 27 2012, accessed April 3, 2020, [https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gc56-17\\_en.pdf](https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gc56-17_en.pdf)

East.”<sup>67</sup> Israel’s policy remained ambiguous due to these reasons: first, Israel always expresses its intention to make Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NWFZ) but is not willing to join international formal and informal efforts to make the region a nuclear free zone. Second, Israel always resisted the US and the international community to halt its nuclear programme and eventually reached an informal pact with the US, according to which, Israel will maintain a policy of *nuclear opacity* and will not declare itself a nuclear weapon capable state. Third, Israel is still the sole nuclear weapon state in the Middle East, which creates deep concerns for the other Middle Eastern states because the US is already asserting pressure over Iran through economic compulsions to suspend its nuclear program.

Israel, in view of its perceived geo-political threats, environment felt compelled to develop its nuclear weapons programme. However, by doing so Israel not only ensured its security vis-à-vis its Arab rivals and Iran but also made them insecure in the process. Insecure Arab neighbours or Iran could indulge into nuclear arms race to address their security needs. Under such circumstances, the recent development of its diplomatic relations with Bahrain and the UAE raises alarm – will it compel Israel to forego its nuclear weapons programme or declare its nuclear weapons. Inevitably, a declared nuclear-armed Israel could instigate nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

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<sup>67</sup> Backgrounder by Lionel Beehner, “Israel’s Nuclear Program and Middle East Peace,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 10, 2006, accessed September 3, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/israels-nuclear-program-and-middle-east-peace>