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Why Does Israel Have a Stockpile of Nuclear Weapons?



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The main result of the meeting between Presidents Putin and Biden in Geneva on June 16 was the joint statement that “we reaffirm the principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” This most welcome recognition that nuclear war would probably destroy the world is especially relevant now, because August sees the 76th anniversary of the first — and so far the last — use of nuclear weapons in war. On 6 August 1945 a US atomic bomb exploded over the Japanese city of Hiroshima, killing some 70,000 people. On August 9 another bomb destroyed Nagasaki city, causing about

40,000 deaths. Japan surrendered on August 15, thereby ending a world war that resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of people, mainly civilians. Estimates vary from 35 to 60 million, but whatever the number, the war was a major catastrophe — but not as great as the cataclysm that would befall the world if nuclear weapons are ever again employed.

While many of us may be confident that the US and Russia will not make use of nuclear weapons against each other, even in the event of major confrontation, that sanguinity cannot extend to other situations, and it is notable that there are four nations that refuse to abide by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which the UN describes as “a landmark international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament.”

The nuclear-armed nations that refuse to adhere to the NPT are North Korea (which signed but then withdrew), India, Israel and Pakistan. Of these, only Israel denies having nuclear weapons and it is notable that neither the US State Department nor the CIA makes mention of Israel’s nuclear arsenal, programme or capabilities in any of their public material.

The State Department writes effusively that “Israel is a great partner to the United States, and Israel has no greater friend than the United States. Americans and Israelis are united by our shared commitment to democracy, economic prosperity, and regional security. The unbreakable bond between our two countries has never been stronger.” The CIA, whose *Israel Factbook* was updated on July 20, states that “the US is by far the leading supplier of arms to Israel” which “has a broad defence industrial base that can develop, produce, support, and sustain a wide variety of weapons systems for both domestic use and export, particularly armoured vehicles, unmanned aerial systems, air defence, and guided missiles.”

Washington sees no evil and hears no evil where Israel is concerned, and when Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman met Israel’s National Security Advisor, Dr Eyal Hulata and Senior Foreign Policy Advisor Shimrit Meir on August 3 she reiterated US policy and made yet more Arab enemies by emphasising the “U.S. government’s unwavering support for Israel’s security.” Which presumably includes support for its nuclear weapons’ programme.

In February the *Times of Israel* carried an Associated Press report that “a secretive Israeli nuclear facility, supposedly at the centre of the nation’s undeclared atomic weapons

program, is undergoing what appears to be its biggest construction project in decades.” There was much international speculation concerning the clandestine development, which was detected through satellite imagery, but nothing consequential was revealed.

The 2021 *Yearbook* of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) records that “Israel has a long-standing policy of not commenting on its nuclear arsenal” and estimates it has ninety warheads of which about 30 “are estimated to be gravity bombs for delivery by F16 aircraft.” According to the *Times of Israel*, the IAF now operates 27 F-35 multi-role strike aircraft, with a total of 50 to be in service by 2024, and *Defence World* reported that “In a dozen photos published by the F-35 Joint Program Office, the USAF stealth fighter can be seen testing its ability to deploy the latest iteration of the B61-12 thermonuclear gravity bomb. The weapon, with a maximum explosive yield of 50 kilotons, is small enough to fit inside the F-35’s internal bomb bay.”

US support is part of a longtime assistance programme which can be expected to continue under whatever government is in power in Jerusalem/Tel Aviv, because in June, after the election of Prime Minister Naftali Bennet, President Biden “expressed his firm intent to deepen cooperation between the United States and Israel on the many challenges and opportunities facing the region”, declaring that “the United States remains unwavering in its support for Israel’s security.”

It is hardly coincidental that both Israel and the US are energetically opposed to Iran and are determined that its government be overthrown and replaced by something along the lines of the corrupt regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi who ruled as a US puppet until his ousting by an autocratic Islamic theocracy. To this end, the administrations in Washington and Jerusalem are endeavouring to make life for ordinary Iranians as difficult and miserable as possible, with one of their targets being Iran’s nascent and inconsequential nuclear power programme. As the BBC reports, in 2015 Iran reached a deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), with the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany that saw it limit its nuclear activities in return for sanctions relief. This was going well until the unstable Trump abrogated the arrangement and imposed further sanctions. Iran, understandably, remains intent on developing nuclear power, but the US and Israel affect to believe that this is a road to speedy production of nuclear weapons.

Accordingly, Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz declared that “Iran has violated all of the guidelines set in the JCPOA [which Trump rendered void] and is only around 10

weeks away from acquiring weapons-grade materials necessary for a nuclear weapon,” which was utter nonsense but has the value of indicating where the new Israeli regime is heading.

Israel and the US and the UK have blamed Iran for an attack on a tanker off the Oman coast on July 29, with Gantz claiming he has “hard evidence” of Iranian responsibility, thus proving that “the Iranian regime is threatening us and sparking a regional arms race . . . Iran is a global and regional problem and an Israeli challenge. We need to continue to develop our abilities to cope with multiple fronts, for this is the future.”

It cannot be denied that the theocratic regime in Teheran is blinkered and bigoted and that the new President, Ebrahim Raisi, is outrageously hardline, but the international problem is that we now have two extremist governments vehemently opposing each other at a time of rising tension.

Israel’s “abilities” include the capability to strike Iran with nuclear weapons. Given that Bennet and Gantz claim that Israel is threatened by Iran, what happens after the next “incident”?

It is far from inconceivable that Israel would employ its nuclear arsenal. After all, for what other reason does it have ninety nuclear weapons?

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