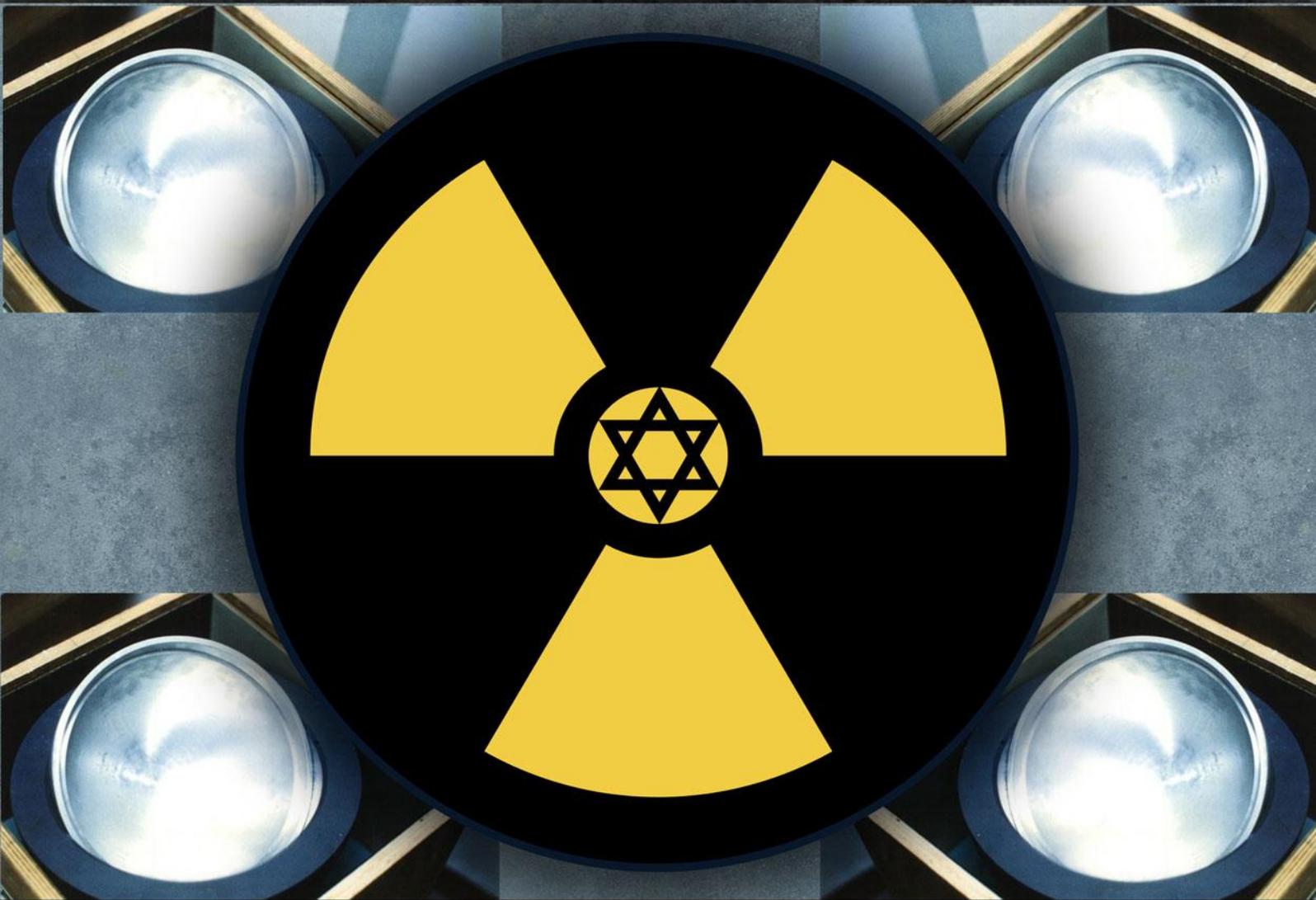


The elephant in the room: Israel's nuclear weapons



Compiled for Sadaka by Dr. David Morrison

SADAKA PAPER 9

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Sadaka Paper No. 9

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October 2010

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Nearly 30 years ago, on 19 June 1981, the UN Security Council passed resolution 487, which demanded that Israel open its secret nuclear facilities to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA). Paragraph 5 of the resolution states:

“[The Security Council] Calls upon Israel urgently to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards”. [\[1\]](#)

The resolution was passed in the aftermath of Israel's aerial attack on an Iraqi nuclear reactor on 7 June 1981. In it, the Security Council strongly condemned the attack and said that, in mounting it, Israel was “in clear violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the norms of international conduct”. It also supported Iraq's claim for compensation.

The resolution was passed unanimously, all five veto-wielding members of the Security Council, including the US, voting for it. Then, the US was supporting Saddam Hussein's Iraq in its aggression against Iran, which lasted from 1980 to 1988.

Israel ignored the resolution and nearly 30 years later its nuclear facilities, bar a small exception, are still not subject to IAEA inspection. The small exception is a 5MW reactor supplied by the US in 1955, located at Nahal Soreq, which has been under IAEA safeguards since the early 60s, at the insistence of the US.

In all, Israel is in breach of over 30 Security Council resolutions, which require action by it and it alone. If Israel had implemented these resolutions, it would have, inter alia, removed all Jewish settlements from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, reversed its annexations of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights – and opened its nuclear facilities to IAEA inspection.

No enforcement action against Israel

Since 1981, the Security Council has taken no action to force Israel to put its nuclear facilities under IAEA oversight, as required by resolution 487. It has taken no action despite the fact that Israel possesses nuclear weapons and a variety of means of delivering them to targets across the Middle East and further afield.

The Federation of American Scientists estimates that Israel has 80 warheads [\[2\]](#); other experts on these matters, for example, Professor Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic & International Studies, reckon it may have as many as 400 (see *Israel's Weapons of Mass Destruction: An Overview* [\[3\]](#), p7/8). Israel can deliver these warheads by aircraft, submarine-launched cruise missiles and ballistic missiles.

This unwillingness to apply sanctions against Israel to compel it to open its nuclear facilities to IAEA oversight contrasts starkly with the action being taken against Iran because of its nuclear activities, even though Iran's nuclear facilities are subject to IAEA inspection, unlike Israel's.

Because Iran refuses to halt uranium enrichment, it has been subject to Security Council imposed economic sanctions since December 2006, most recently in Security Council resolution 1929, passed on 9 June 2010. For the first time, sanctioning Iran met with opposition on the Security Council, Turkey and Brazil voting against (and Lebanon abstaining).

In addition, on 25 July 2010 the EU imposed its own package of economic sanctions on Iran [4]. By contrast, the EU continues to accord Israel privileged access to the EU market through the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

The Green movement

It should be noted that the opposition Green movement in Iran is opposed to economic sanctions. On 23 May 2010, the Daily Telegraph reported its leader, presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, saying:

"In recent days, the issue of sanctions has been raised against our nation. Although we think this situation arose from tactless and adventurous foreign policies, we are against it because it will affect people's lives." [5]

In an interview with *The Guardian* on 11 August 2010, the other Green presidential candidate, Mehdi Karroubi, said that "punitive international sanctions imposed on Iran have strengthened Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government" and "blamed the US and Britain for adopting counterproductive policies to combat Iran's suspect nuclear programme, describing sanctions as a gift to the Iranian regime" [6].

There is no evidence that the Green movement is opposed to Iran's present nuclear activities. On the contrary, it appears to approve of them. When Iran agreed in principle in October 2009 to swap a large proportion of its low enriched uranium for more highly enriched uranium fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR), Mir-Hossein Mousavi was less than enthusiastic about the plan, saying in a statement on 31 October 2010:

"Today, it appears that a large proportion of the product of Iran's nuclear program, which went on to see this much chaos and was to bring a number of sanctions for the people, must be handed to another country, in hopes that they will be kind enough to offer us some fuel later on." [7]

This opposition from the Green movement to the original swap plan may have contributed to Iran's refusal to put the plan into effect and to Iran's preference for the new plan agreed in May 2010 through the mediation of Turkey and Brazil. In the new plan, Turkey is to act as middleman in the swap, guaranteeing that Iran would receive fuel for the TRR in exchange for its low enriched uranium [8].

Has Iran a nuclear weapons programme?

Iran is being subjected to economic sanctions despite the facts that its nuclear facilities are subject to IAEA oversight, unlike Israel's, and that the IAEA has found no evidence that Iran has, or ever had, a nuclear weapons programme.

According to a US National Intelligence Estimate in December 2007 from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Iran halted a nuclear weapons programme in the autumn of 2003, and hasn't restarted its programme subsequently [9]. Commenting on this conclusion on 4 December 2007, IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei, noted that:

"the Estimate tallies with the Agency's consistent statements over the last few years that, although Iran still needs to clarify some important aspects of its past and present nuclear activities, the Agency has no concrete evidence of an ongoing nuclear weapons program or undeclared nuclear facilities in Iran." [10]

A recent report to the US Congress for the year 2009 by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence stated:

“We continue to assess Iran is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons though we do not know whether Tehran eventually will decide to produce nuclear weapons.” [\[11\]](#)

An IAEA report on Iran’s nuclear activities (by Mohamed ElBaradei’s successor, Yukiya Amano) in May 2010 [\[12\]](#) presents no evidence of weapons related activity. In particular, it repeats the message of earlier reports that only low enriched uranium suitable for a power generation reactor is being produced at Iran’s Natanz enrichment plant and that no nuclear material has been diverted from that plant for other purposes, for example, to further enrich uranium to produce fissile material for a nuclear weapon.

It is true that the report also says:

“Iran needs to cooperate in clarifying outstanding issues which give rise to concerns about possible military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear programme.” (paragraph 38)

There is a possibility that Iran has nuclear facilities for military purposes, which it hasn’t declared to the IAEA, but the IAEA has found no evidence of this.

By contrast, there is no doubt whatsoever that Israel possesses nuclear weapons and the means of delivering them, not just to targets in the Middle East, but probably half way round the world. Nevertheless, the US and the EU demand more and more sanctions against Iran to pressurise it into halting its nuclear activities, while turning a blind eye to Israel’s terrifying nuclear arsenal, which is largely unmentioned when Iran’s nuclear activities are discussed.

Some states in the Middle East, notably Turkey, have become increasingly irritated by this double standard being applied by the US and its allies. As Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Erdogan, said on 30 March 2010, after talks with German Chancellor, Angela Merkel:

“We are against nuclear weapons in our region. But is there another country in our region that has nuclear weapons? Yes, there is. And have they been subjected to sanctions? No.” [\[13\]](#)

Erdogan doesn’t believe that Turkey’s Iranian neighbour is developing nuclear weapons. Here’s what he told the BBC on 16 March:

“Iran has consistently spoken of the fact that it is seeking to use nuclear energy for civilian purposes, that they are using uranium enrichment programmes for civilian purposes only. That’s what Mr Ahmadinejad told me, many times before. But it’s not very fair to manipulate this fact, and say that Iran has nuclear weapons.” [\[14\]](#)

The Nixon/Meir deal

The US never mentions the fact that Israel possesses nuclear weapons. It took a vow of silence on the issue over 40 years ago: to be precise, on 26 September 1969, when US President Nixon made a secret, unwritten, agreement with Israeli Prime Minister, Golda Meir, in a one-to-one meeting in the Oval Office in the White House.

Under this deal, the US agreed not to acknowledge publicly that Israel possessed nuclear weapons, while knowing full well that it did. In return, Israel undertook to maintain a low profile about its nuclear weapons: there was to be no acknowledgment of their existence, and no testing which would reveal their existence. That way, the US would not be forced to take a public position for or against Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons.

(For the fascinating story of how this came to be US policy, see *Israel crosses the threshold* by Avner Cohen and William Burr, published in the May-June 2006 issue of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* [\[15\]](#)).

Israel started a nuclear weapons programme in the early 50s. For many years, it went to great lengths to keep the existence of this programme secret from the US, because it feared that the US would put pressure on it to terminate the programme. After the US became aware of the existence of the nuclear facility at Dimona in 1960, the Kennedy administration insisted on inspecting it to confirm Israel's assertion that it was for civil purposes only. US inspectors visited the facility seven times in the 1960s, but never found direct evidence of weapons-related activities – because Israel went to extraordinary lengths to hide it from them. So, although inspectors suspected the wool was being pulled over their eyes, they were unable to prove it.

When the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) [\[16\]](#) was available for signing in 1968, the Johnson administration pressed Israel to sign and declare its programme, which by then the US was certain existed. Israel assured the US that it would not be the first country to “introduce” nuclear weapons into the Middle East, but refused to confirm to the US that “non-introduction” meant “non-possession” – and it refused to sign the NPT. Nixon refused to use a forthcoming sale of F-4 Phantom aircraft to Israel as a means of bringing pressure on Israel to sign.

The issue was finally resolved by the deal between Nixon and Meir in September 1969, at which point the US ceased sending inspection teams to Dimona and stopped pressing Israel to sign the NPT.

US “no comment” on Israel’s nuclear weapons

In accordance with the Nixon/Meir deal, the US has refused ever since to acknowledge that Israel possesses nuclear weapons. This leads to the absurd situation in which US discussion of nuclear matters has to proceed without the Israeli nuclear weapons being mentioned.

Thus, for example, in his speech in Prague on 5 April 2009, when he announced “America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons” [\[17\]](#), Israel's nuclear arsenal was off limits. This led to an amusing exchange at a press briefing onboard Air Force One en route to Prague between a journalist and a White House briefer, Denis McDonough (see White House website [\[18\]](#)). The dialogue included the following:

Q Have you included Israel in the discussion [about a world without nuclear weapons]?

MR. McDONOUGH: Pardon me?

Q Have you included Israel in the discussion?

MR. McDONOUGH: Look, I think what you'll see tomorrow is a very comprehensive speech.

It is rare for journalists to ask the US administration awkward questions about Israel's nuclear arsenal. Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, visited Washington on 18 May 2009 for talks with President Obama. A large part of the joint press conference afterwards was concerned with the possible military aspects of Iran's nuclear programme, but no journalist thought it appropriate to ask about the undeniable military aspects of Israel's. However, at the President's press conference on 13 April 2010 after the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, Scott Wilson of the Washington Post asked:

“You have spoken often about the need to bring US policy in line with its treaty obligations internationally to eliminate the perception of hypocrisy that some of the world sees toward the United States and its allies. In that spirit and in that venue, will you call

on Israel to declare its nuclear program and sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty? And if not, why wouldn't other countries see that as an incentive not to sign on to the treaty that you say is important to strengthen?" [\[19\]](#)

President Obama replied:

"... as far as Israel goes, I'm not going to comment on their program."

That's the Nixon/Meir deal in action 40 years after it was done.

Until the President applies the same principle to Iran and says:

"... as far as Iran goes, I'm not going to comment on their [nuclear] program."

he (and the US) is wide open to the charge of hypocrisy.

What Israel says about its nuclear weapons

Israel continues to adopt the position of neither confirming nor denying that it possesses nuclear weapons. Indeed, it uses exactly the same form of words today as it used in discussions with the US in 1969. In a statement to the IAEA General Conference in September 2009, Dr Shaul Chorev, Director of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, actually uttered the words:

"Israel has stated repeatedly that it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons in to the Middle East." [\[20\]](#)

However, on a visit to Germany in December 2006, Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, came clean about Israel's nuclear weapons, albeit without meaning to. *The Jerusalem Post* reported the story as follows:

"Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's Office denied there had been any change in Israel's long-standing policy of nuclear ambiguity, after Olmert appeared to admit that Israel had nuclear capability in an interview with the German television network SAT 1.

"Regarding Israel's alleged nuclear capabilities, during his television interview, Olmert became agitated when asked if the fact that Israel possessed nuclear power weakened the West's position against Iran.

"'Israel is a democracy, Israel doesn't threaten any country with anything, never did', he said. 'The most that we tried to get for ourselves is to try to live without terror, but we never threaten another nation with annihilation. Iran openly, explicitly and publicly threatens to wipe Israel off the map. Can you say that this is the same level, when they [Iran] are aspiring to have nuclear weapons, as America, France, Israel, Russia?'" [\[21\]](#)

The US "Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone"

Formally, the US is in favour of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, as is the EU. This may seem surprising, since putting it into effect requires Israel to give up its nuclear weapons. Of course, in accordance with the Nixon/Meir deal, in supporting a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, the US doesn't mention that the chief obstacle to its achievement is Israel's nuclear weapons.

It is not a policy that the US expects to realise any time soon. If it is not prepared to apply sufficient pressure to force Israel to halt settlement building, there is no chance of it

applying the much greater pressure that would be necessary to force Israel to give up its nuclear weapons.

The US (and the EU) constantly say that Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would be highly destabilising and could set off a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. In fact, the race started in the early 1950s when Israel began a nuclear weapons programme and, while initially the US made an attempt to halt this programme and maintain a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East, it gave up in September 1969 with the Nixon/Meir deal.

Like the US, Israel is also formally committed to the Middle East being free from nuclear weapons (and chemical and biological weapons). Speaking for Israel at the IAEA General Conference in September 2009, Dr Chorev said:

“It is our vision and policy to establish the Middle East as a mutually verifiable zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems.” [\[20\]](#)

Needless to say, he didn't mention that the chief obstacle to the realisation of this vision is Israel's possession of a formidable arsenal of “weapons of mass destruction”.

Universal adherence to the NPT

Formally, it is also US policy that all states, including Israel, sign up to the NPT. Yet again, in accordance with the Nixon/Meir deal, in saying this, the US doesn't mention that in order to do so, Israel would have to give up its nuclear weapons.

Today, the NPT has 189 signatories, 5 as “nuclear-weapon” states, which, under the Treaty, are allowed to keep their nuclear weapons, and the other 184 as “non-nuclear-weapon” states, which are forbidden to acquire them.

Under Article IX(3) of the Treaty, states that “manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device prior to 1 January, 1967” qualify as “nuclear-weapon” states. The 5 states that qualified for this privilege were China, France, Russia, the UK and the US.

Today, only four states in the world – India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea – are not signatories. India, Israel and Pakistan have never signed; North Korea did sign, but has since withdrawn. All four of them possess nuclear weapons and, since none of them exploded a nuclear device before the beginning of 1967, none of them can sign the Treaty as a “nuclear-weapon” state.

If they sign the Treaty, they will have to sign as “non-nuclear-weapon” states, but to do that they would have to give up their nuclear weapons and submit their nuclear facilities to IAEA oversight. Universal adherence to the NPT isn't going to happen any time soon.

(India, Pakistan and North Korea have all tested nuclear weapons, but not prior to 1 January 1967, the deadline for qualification as a “nuclear-weapon” state under the NPT. There is no firm evidence that Israel has ever exploded a nuclear device. However, it is possible that a suspected nuclear explosion detected by a US Vela satellite on 22 September 1979 in the south Atlantic was a joint South African-Israeli test. Even if this were true, Israel would not qualify as a “nuclear-weapon” state under the NPT. However, Israel did carry out a nuclear weapons related test of some kind on 2 November 1966 at Dimona (see letter by Or Rabinowitz in *The Guardian* on 16 August 2010 [\[22\]](#)). If a nuclear explosion took place on that occasion, albeit one with near-zero yield, then Israel would qualify to join the NPT as a “nuclear-weapon” state.)

Withdrawing from the NPT

Those states – India, Israel, Pakistan – that didn't sign the NPT and developed nuclear weapons broke no international treaty obligations in doing so.

Iran signed at the earliest opportunity in 1968 when the Shah was in power and, after the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, the Islamic Republic didn't withdraw. Had Iran refused to sign at the outset, or subsequently withdrawn, it would have been in the same position as Israel, that is, free to develop nuclear weapons without being in breach of any international treaty obligations.

Iran has always denied that it wants to develop nuclear weapons. It is worth noting that Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, issued a fatwa in September 2004 that "the production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islam and that the Islamic Republic of Iran shall never acquire these weapons" [23]. In doing so, he was following in the footsteps of his predecessor, the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini.

Article IX of the NPT allows a state to withdraw. It states:

"Each Party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty, have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country. It shall give notice of such withdrawal to all other Parties to the Treaty and to the United Nations Security Council three months in advance. Such notice shall include a statement of the extraordinary events it regards as having jeopardized its supreme interests."

By any objective standard, Iran has had good grounds for withdrawal, namely, the build up over the past 40 years of an Israeli nuclear arsenal directed in part at it. There could hardly be a better example of "extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty", which "have jeopardized its supreme interests". And what applies to Iran applies to every other state in the Middle East.

Civil nuclear power an "inalienable right"

Article IV(1) of the NPT states:

"Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of this Treaty."

So, in having a civil nuclear program today Iran is exercising an "inalienable right" laid down in the Treaty. As part of a civil nuclear program, Iran has an "inalienable right" under the Treaty to establish uranium enrichment facilities, providing they are verified by the IAEA to be for non-military purposes.

Iran has said repeatedly that, by demanding that it cease uranium enrichment, the US and the EU are flying in the face of what is supposed to be an "inalienable right" of all states that have signed the NPT. The least that can be said is that Iran has an arguable case. Certainly, other "non-nuclear-weapon" signatories of the NPT, for example, Brazil and Japan, have operational uranium enrichment facilities.

In an interview with the Financial Times on 10 June 2009, Senator John Kerry, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, admitted that under the NPT:

“They [Iran] have a right to peaceful nuclear power and to enrichment in that purpose.”
[\[24\]](#)

General Assembly resolutions

The creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East has been the subject of resolutions in international fora since the mid 70s, when evidence began to emerge that Israel was developing nuclear weapons.

In December 1974, the UN General Assembly passed resolution 3263 (XXIX) [\[25\]](#) calling for the establishment of such a zone and for all states in the region to adhere to the NPT. The resolution was proposed by Egypt and Iran and adopted almost unanimously, with only Israel (and Burma) abstaining. Since the resolution didn't mention Israel specifically, let alone Israel's possession of nuclear weapons, the US was able to vote for it without infringing the Nixon/Meir deal.

For the next 30 years, the General Assembly passed a similar resolution in each annual session. From 1980 onwards, it was passed without opposition or abstention, not even by Israel. Needless to say, none of these resolutions had any effect on the ground in the Middle East.

1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference

Nor did a similar resolution calling for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, which was passed at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, attended by NPT signatories and therefore excluding Israel. The resolution [\[26\]](#) was co-sponsored by the US, UK and Russia. Again, since it didn't mention Israel specifically, the US was able to vote for it without infringing the Nixon/Meir deal.

The NPT was initially scheduled to last for 25 years, at the end of which, in 1995, a Conference of the signatories had to be held to decide whether to extend its operation. The Conference extended the Treaty indefinitely without dissent, but the “nuclear-weapon” signatories had to pay a price, namely, a resolution calling for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Many “non-nuclear-weapons” signatories, especially Israel's Arab neighbours, were unhappy that its possession of nuclear weapons made a mockery of the non-proliferation principles they were required to adhere to by the Treaty.

This 1995 resolution was reaffirmed by the 2000 NPT Review Conference, which called “upon all States in the Middle East that have not yet done so, without exception, to accede to the Treaty as soon as possible and to place their nuclear facilities under full-scope International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards” [\[27\]](#) (p17).

Singling out Israel

Alongside this series of General Assembly resolutions calling for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, but without mentioning Israel, from the late 80s onwards the General Assembly passed resolutions calling directly for Israel to accede to the NPT – and for the Security Council to force Israel to open its nuclear facilities to IAEA inspection in accordance with Security Council resolution 487. The IAEA General Conference, at which all member states of the IAEA (including Israel) are represented, passed similar resolutions. These resolutions were always opposed by the US (and Israel) since they singled out Israel and expressed concern about its nuclear activities.

This silly game is still being played today, for example, at the IAEA General Conference in September 2009. There, resolution GC(53)/RES/16 [\[28\]](#), titled *Application of IAEA*

safeguards in the Middle East, calling for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and for all states in the region to adhere to the NPT, was passed almost unanimously. The important parts of it were:

[The General Conference]

2. Calls upon all States in the region to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); ...

4. Affirms the urgent need for all States in the Middle East to forthwith accept the application of full-scope Agency safeguards to all their nuclear activities as an important confidence-building measure among all States in the region and as a step in enhancing peace and security in the context of the establishment of an NWFZ [nuclear-weapon-free zone];

5. Calls upon all parties directly concerned to consider seriously taking the practical and appropriate steps required for the implementation of the proposal to establish a mutually and effectively verifiable NWFZ in the region, and invites the countries concerned which have not yet done so to adhere to international non-proliferation regimes, including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, as a means of complementing participation in a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and of strengthening peace and security in the region;

This was passed by 103 votes to 0 with the support of the US, because it didn't specifically mention Israel (which also supported the resolution, apart from paragraph 2).

By contrast, the next day another resolution, GC(53)/RES/17 [\[29\]](#), titled *Israeli nuclear capabilities*, was opposed by the US and by EU states, including Ireland, because it addressed directly the obstacle to the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free-zone in the Middle East, namely, Israel's possession of nuclear weapons. The important parts of the resolution were:

[The General Conference]

1. Expresses concern about the threat posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons to the security and stability of the Middle East;

2. Expresses concern about the Israeli nuclear capabilities, and calls upon Israel to accede to the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards;

However, the resolution was passed by 49 votes to 45 against (with 16 abstentions).

The 2010 NPT Review Conference

The 2010 NPT Review Conference took place in New York in May 2010. The Obama administration was anxious to avoid a repeat of the outcome of the 2005 Review Conference, which failed to agree a final consensus declaration.

A sticking point then was the lack of progress on implementing the 1995 review resolution calling for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. The US refused to put its name to any text which involved taking additional measures to induce Israel to give up its nuclear weapons and accede to the NPT.

This time, a coalition of the 118 states in the Non-Aligned Movement [\[30\]](#), led by Egypt, lobbied strongly for progress on this (and other) issues. In order to achieve a final consensus declaration, the US had to agree to "a process leading to full implementation of

the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East”, to quote from the conference final document [\[31\]](#) (p30).

Specifically, in a resolution on the Middle East, the Conference agreed that

“The Secretary-General of the United Nations and the co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution [the US, UK and Russia], in consultation with the States of the region, will convene a conference in 2012, to be attended by all States of the Middle East, on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by the States of the region, and with the full support and engagement of the nuclear-weapon States. The 2012 Conference shall take as its terms of reference the 1995 Resolution;”

The resolution also specifically stated Israel should accede to the NPT as a “non-nuclear weapon” state (ie that it should give up its nuclear weapons) and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards (p29/30). Iran’s nuclear activities weren’t mentioned in the resolution.

Surprisingly, the US put its name to this. Israel’s interests had apparently been sacrificed in order to avoid the conference ending in failure.

But not for long. Immediately after the US had put its name to the declaration on 28 May 2010, President Obama’s National Security Advisor, General James Jones, stated that the US had “serious reservations” about the proposal for a conference about a Middle East nuclear free zone [\[32\]](#). He went on:

“The United States has long supported such a zone, although our view is that a comprehensive and durable peace in the region and full compliance by all regional states with their arms control and nonproliferation obligations are essential precursors for its establishment.”

So, as far as the US is concerned, it is OK for Israel to keep its nuclear weapons until there is a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East.

General Jones continued:

“The United States will not permit a conference or actions that could jeopardize Israel’s national security. We will not accept any approach that singles out Israel or sets unrealistic expectations. The United States’ long-standing position on Middle East peace and security remains unchanged, including its unshakeable commitment to Israel’s security. ...

“As a cosponsor charged with enabling this conference, the United States will ensure that a conference will only take place if and when all countries feel confident that they can attend. Because of [the] gratuitous way that Israel has been singled out, the prospect for a conference in 2012 that involves all key states in the region is now in doubt and will remain so until all are assured that it can operate in a[n] unbiased and constructive way.”

So, the US will ensure that the conference will not happen if Israel doesn’t want to attend – and Israel has made it clear that it isn’t going to attend. So, within hours of the 189 signatories of the NPT, including the US, agreeing to the conference being held, the US has unilaterally determined that the conference will not be held because Israel, which isn’t a signatory to the NPT, doesn’t want it to be held.

This US promise to accord Israel a veto over the holding of a conference was repeated when Prime Minister Netanyahu met President Obama in Washington on 6 July 2010 –

see the official White House account of the meeting, *Readout of the President's Meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel* [33]. The latter also states:

“The President told the Prime Minister he recognizes that Israel must always have the ability to defend itself, by itself, against any threat or possible combination of threats, and that only Israel can determine its security needs.”

In that, the Obama administration accepts that Israel has a right to nuclear weapons for deterrence purposes – and the right to decide when, if ever, it no longer needs nuclear weapons for deterrence purposes. If that principle were applied universally, then every state in the world would have a right to nuclear weapons, if it believed them necessary to deter aggression.

It is difficult to reconcile that with the Obama administration's stated view that all states in the world, including Israel, should adhere to the NPT and that there should a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East – and “a world without nuclear weapons”.

David Morrison
October 2010

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Sadaka – an Arabic term for ‘friendship’ – is an Association established in Ireland in 2009 to maximise support in Ireland for the Palestinian people in their struggle for national, democratic and human rights. It aims to persuade those in government to champion the cause of justice for Palestine.

The Board of Sadaka consists of Marie Crawley (Chair), Noreen Byrne (Secretary), Adnan Shabab (Treasurer), Dr. David Morrison, Alan Lonergan, Dr. Des McGuinness, Hilary Minch, Philip O’Connor, Dr. Elaine Murtagh and Caitlin Ni Chonail.

If you would like to become a supporter of Sadaka or donate to our campaign, please contact us at:

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Sadaka supports a peaceful settlement in Israel/Palestine based on the principles of democracy and justice, be that in two states or in one state. We maintain an independent position on internal politics within Palestine, favouring neither Fatah, Hamas nor any other Palestinian political organisation.