

# Israel's weapons of mass destruction



**Much direct and indirect evidence shows clearly that Israel is in possession of a large nuclear arsenal, together with chemical and biological weapons, and the means of delivering them over long distances.**

## The nuclear arsenal

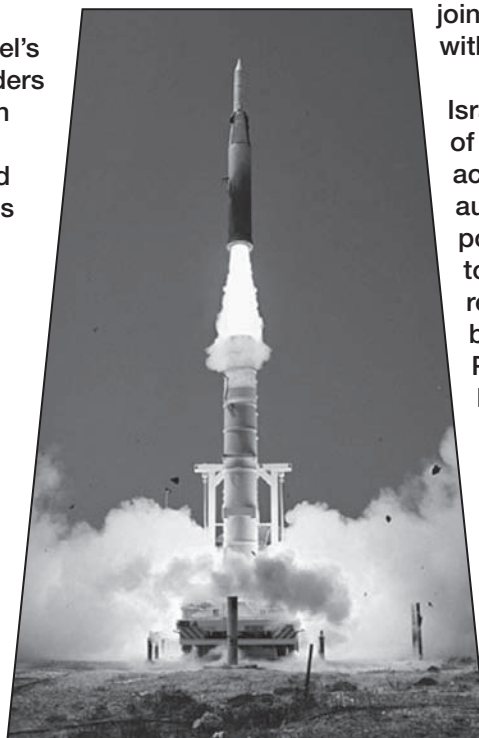
**J**ane's Sentinel Country Assessment (sentinel.janes.com), which provides expert analysis of global military and political structures, states that Israel's armed forces are "head and shoulders above those of its neighbours, both in technical sophistication and in the available range of weapons and sensors, including nuclear weapons and missile systems."

By 1995, according to the United States Air Force Counter Proliferation Center (a US military source), a complete repertoire already existed, including neutron bombs, 7 nuclear mines, 'suitcase' bombs and submarine-borne bombs.

By 2010, international sources reported that Israel had up to 300 nuclear warheads, about the same quantity as the UK.<sup>1</sup> These include both intercontinental-range thermonuclear weapons and artillery-delivered, enhanced-radiation tactical weapons ('neutron bombs').

The weapons are developed and produced at a number of nuclear facilities in Israel, from the nuclear reactor at Dimona in the Negev, to nuclear storage bases at Eilabun near the Sea of Galilee and at Tirosh, south of Tel Aviv, and the national weapons testing laboratory at Soreq, near Tirosh.<sup>2</sup> No inspection of these facilities by the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) has been allowed.

Very little is known about Israel's disposal of nuclear waste, but Palestinian farmers in villages south of Hebron in the Occupied Territories have reported truckloads of waste being buried by Israeli soldiers in white overalls, who temporarily declared the area a closed military zone. Much higher rates of cancer, mutation and sterility have also been reported in the area.<sup>3</sup>



*Jericho III*

## 'Don't ask, don't tell'

**I**srael has not joined the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), of which every other state in the Middle East is a member, and has also refused to support a proposed Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, designed to prohibit the further production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. Israel has signed but not ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. This means that Israel is the only nation in the world that has not joined any of the major treaties dealing with nuclear weapons.

Over the past 40 years the US and Israel have agreed that Israel's possession of nuclear weapons should not be acknowledged — what Avner Cohen, author of *Israel and the bomb*,<sup>4</sup> calls a policy of 'Don't ask, don't tell'. According to Cohen this understanding was first reached in 1969, in a verbal agreement between President Richard Nixon and Prime Minister Golda Meir, and has been tacitly maintained ever since.

Occasionally, the mask has slipped. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was sharply criticised in Israel when he accidentally acknowledged possession of nuclear weapons in an interview on German TV (12 December 2006), by talking about Iran "aspiring to have nuclear weapons, like America, France, Israel and Russia".

The UN General Assembly and the IAEA General Conference have adopted 13 resolutions since 1987, appealing to Israel to join the NPT,

but all have been ignored.

## Delivery systems

**I**n recent years, Israel has markedly increased the range of its delivery systems which are capable of delivering various forms of WMD.<sup>5</sup> Whereas previously the limit of the range was hundreds of kilometres, now it is many thousands.

Israel has approximately 50 Jericho II missiles with a 1,500 km range and 1,000kg payload.

In February 2008, a new missile, Jericho III, was tested from the south of Tel-Aviv and landed in the Mediterranean.<sup>6</sup> This system, which can carry nuclear warheads as well as other WMD, is thought to be

capable of reaching most of Europe and much of Asia.

The **Shavit space launch vehicle** has a range of 4,500 km with a 150-250 kg payload. Some authorities suggest that a range of 7,000 km could eventually be possible.

In addition, Israel has fighter aircraft, the **F-15, F-16, F-4E, F-15I** and the **F-16I**, which are capable of long-range operations and of carrying nuclear and chemical warheads.

When the US rejected Israeli requests for cruise missiles such as the Tomahawk, in 1998, Israel developed its own Gabriel-4 anti-ship cruise missile, with a 200km range and 500kg payload.

It later developed the Popeye Turbo air-launch cruise missiles with a 200-300 km range and unknown payload. (The Popeye has variants that can be deployed on submarines.)

Over the last 10 years Israel has purchased several **Dolphin submarines** from Germany, capable of carrying nuclear warheads, presenting a threat which is both wide-ranging and difficult to monitor.<sup>7</sup>

In 2009 the Obama administration approved the delivery of over 100 **Harpoon sea-to-sea missiles** to Israel, with a 120 km range and 220 kg payload — again capable of carrying nuclear warheads.<sup>8</sup>

## The whistle-blower

In September 1986, Mordechai Vanunu, an Israeli technician who had worked at the secret Dimona site for eight years, gave the Sunday Times newspaper the first detailed account of Israel's nuclear capability.<sup>9</sup>

Vanunu was kidnapped by Mossad agents in Italy, smuggled to Israel and imprisoned for eighteen years, 11 of those in solitary confinement. Since his release he has been subject to severe restrictions, preventing him from leaving the country and even talking to foreigners. In 2010 he was jailed again, for violating those restrictions, and was declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.



## Chemical and biological weapons

Israel is not a signatory to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, although it has signed — but not ratified — the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It has revealed virtually nothing about its capabilities in the field of chemical and biological weapons and has never issued a public statement relating to them. As with nuclear weapons, Israel maintains a policy of ambiguity. However, a series of leaks and reports by US and other official bodies suggests that Israel maintains an advanced research and development programme in this field.<sup>10</sup>

From 1948, David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime

minister, was active in recruiting top scientists in the field, and made no secret of the importance he placed on developing Israel's capabilities. Israeli research related to biological weapons is based at the Israeli Centre for Biological Research, founded in 1952, in the town of Nes Ziona close to Tel Aviv.<sup>11</sup>

According to international sources,<sup>12</sup> the typhoid epidemic that spread in Acre in the days before the town fell to the Israeli forces in 1948 was the result of the deliberate contamination of Acre's water supply by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). Egyptian sources, on 29 May 1948, also stated that four Israeli soldiers were caught trying to infect artesian wells in Gaza with "a liquid, which was discovered to contain the germs of dysentery and typhoid."

More recently, in 2001, foreign observers reported apparent poison gas attacks on demonstrators in Gaza and Bethlehem. The IDF frequently uses tear gas, but the effects on this occasion were serious: severe vomiting, muscular paralysis, convulsions and seizures, leading to the hospitalisation of dozens of victims. The effects lasted several days, even weeks.<sup>13</sup> The IDF dismissed the reports, saying the symptoms were due to 'anxiety'.

The use of white phosphorus, while not illegal in some battlefield situations, is prohibited as a weapon against civilians especially in crowded residential areas, as was the case during Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza two years ago. The UN Goldstone Report condemned this as just one of a number of war crimes committed by the IDF.

## Cooperation with Western powers

In the late 1950s France built the Dimona nuclear reactor, which is still the source of Israel's plutonium.<sup>14</sup> In the sixties it helped Israel develop its first Jericho I missile.

The reactor's heavy water was supplied by Norway in 1959, and more was supplied in 1963 by the US. Israel got further help from the US, in the form of a small thermal research reactor at Soreq. (This was the early training ground for Israeli nuclear technicians.)

President Kennedy refused to sign any security arrangement with Israel, but his assassination brought the pro-Israel Lyndon Johnson to power. Subsequent US administrations have all cooperated with Israel in the development and supply of both conventional and nuclear weaponry and their delivery systems. Fifty F-16s were actually given to Israel as a reward for 'restraint' during the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>15</sup> More recently, President Obama offered Israel \$3 billion worth of fighter planes to extend the non-existent freeze on settlement building.

The vast amount of money the US pours into Israel (approximately \$92bn since 1949) is partly to be explained in terms of the leverage provided by Israel's nuclear programme. In the words of Amos Rubin, economic adviser to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir: "If left to its own Israel will have no choice but to fall back on a riskier defence which will endanger itself and the world at large... To enable Israel to abstain from

dependence on nuclear arms calls for \$2 to 3 billion per year in U.S. aid.”<sup>16</sup>

In 1959, Britain sold Israel 20 tonnes of heavy water, which is used to produce plutonium, via Norway — though this only came to light in 2005. The UK currently has a flourishing arms trade with Israel (see PSC fact sheet *Palestinian Blood on British Hands*), including supplying components for F16 aircraft and surface-to-air missiles.

With technical and financial assistance from the US, Israel is currently assembling one of the world’s most advanced missile defence systems. This, together with access to US real-time satellite data, will greatly strengthen Israel’s strategic position in the region.

## Links with Apartheid South Africa

**D**ocuments recently declassified by the South African government show how Israel and South Africa entered into a secret agreement in 1975, part of which was a pledge by Israel to supply nuclear know-how to the apartheid regime.<sup>17</sup> In 1979 Israel is widely believed to have conducted a joint nuclear test with South Africa, following reports of other tests in 1963 and 1966.<sup>18</sup>

The Israeli/South African collaboration did not end with the bomb testing; it continued until the fall of Apartheid, especially with the developing and testing of medium range missiles and the supplying of uranium. In return, Israel became a major trade outlet for South Africa, to enable the Apartheid state avoid the international economic sanctions then in place. (In 1991, South Africa became the first nuclear state to disarm and join the NPT.)

## Israel and NATO

**I**n 1987, Israel and the US signed a Memorandum of Understanding which formally acknowledged Israel as a non-NATO ally with the same rights as NATO allies. Israel has participated in NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue since its inception in 1994, then in 2001 signed a security agreement with NATO, and has undertaken joint exercises with a number of NATO countries.

Speaking in Israel in 2005, NATO’s Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stated that, in relation to Israel, “we try to move from dialogue to partnership”. Israel’s concrete proposals included, he added, “the fight against terrorism, or joint military exercises where Israel’s expertise is very much valued”.<sup>19</sup>

The US has been particularly vocal in calling for even closer links. A paper by Ronald Asmus and Bruce Jackson suggested that “anchoring Israel more closely with NATO and the EU, can reduce its sense of isolation.”<sup>20</sup> While there were repeated references to threats from nuclear weapons and the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, there were no references to the dangers posed by Israel’s nuclear

arsenal, or the inherent risks of a link to NATO, which has a ‘first use’ of nuclear weapons policy. Nor did the authors question whether Israeli weapons of mass destruction would be integrated into NATO systems and command, as the UK Trident nuclear arsenal is.

Israel is of course keen to promote the view that it is a natural ally of NATO, a bulwark against Islamic radicalism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, singling out Iran as a prime ‘threat’. Viewed from an Arab perspective, it is Israel, not Iran, which poses the major military threat in the area.<sup>21</sup>

In 2008 Israeli forces held a joint exercise with the Greek air force, which appeared to be testing a strike on Iran.

It is not clear whether the exercise with the Greek air force was done with the support and consent of NATO and why NATO is willing to train Israeli pilots for long distance flights. Although NATO countries subscribe to a counter-proliferation policy, they have been unwilling to question the very basis of an ever closer relationship with an undeclared nuclear power which is guilty of daily violations of the Geneva Convention and complete disregard for dozens of UN Resolutions. Israel, for its part, naturally considers that NATO membership would provide a cloak of legitimacy for its illegal actions.

## The global military-industrial complex

**I**n 2000, the US Congressional Research Service ranked Israel as the 10th biggest arms exporter in the world. It has major customers in China, India, Turkey and Europe and has been prepared to break sanctions and fuel civil wars or internal repression by selling arms to regimes in Central and South America, Burma, Rwanda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

In India alone, Israel has military transactions in the pipeline exceeding \$3 billion. Defence analysts predict that Israel’s exports are set to overtake those of Russia, India’s traditional military trading partner.

Massive US funding has been the driving force of Israel’s burgeoning industry. It has a world reputation in tanks, anti-ballistic missile systems, air-to-air missiles, combat aircraft upgrades, unmanned drones, airborne photography systems, radar systems and electronic surveillance systems. Many of these involve joint ventures with European and US arms manufacturers.<sup>22</sup>

Collaboration and interdependence in such a lucrative and politically charged field as armaments naturally strengthen Israel’s ties with its customers and partners, and make the countries involved less willing to exert any pressure on Israel.

## Future developments?

**B**y introducing nuclear weapons into the Middle East — despite repeated promises that it would not be the first country to do so — Israel has

destabilised an already highly volatile region. Its proven readiness to use massive force 'pre-emptively' against several of its neighbours, with the cooperation and encouragement of its Western allies, must mean that other countries in the Middle East will seek to deter future attacks by enhancing their own arsenal.

Currently Israel is pressing hard for Western armed intervention against Iran, saying it will intervene itself if this is not forthcoming. Its new defence system may make Israel feel it is impervious to retaliation if it does attack Iran, with either conventional or nuclear weapons. The possible consequences of such an attack are unknowable, but potentially catastrophic.

The current situation also underlines the west's double standards, which arouse anger and contempt in many parts of the world: on the one hand Israel is allowed to build up a huge nuclear arsenal with the support of Western powers, while the mere (unsubstantiated) suspicion of Iraq having WMD was enough to subject that country to 20 years of crippling sanctions, saturation bombing and political disintegration.

## The Middle East — a nuclear-free zone?

A positive step forward was taken at the May 2010 conference reviewing the NPT. Signatories of the Treaty — including the US — reiterated their call for a nuclear weapons-free zone to be established in the Middle East. They urged "Israel's accession to the Treaty and placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards". They also endorsed the convening of a conference in 2012, to be attended by all Middle Eastern states, on "the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction".

Potentially, this links Israeli disarmament with pressure on Iran not to develop WMD.

For the moment, Israel has declared that it would

not take part, refusing to sit at the table with the Iranian government. It remains to be seen whether the Obama administration, that has stressed its commitment to the NPT, will be able to persuade Israel to comply.

## PSC joins CND in making the following demands:

- The UN IAEA should inspect facilities at Dimona and other relevant sites in Israel for Weapons of Mass Destruction and report its findings to the Security Council with specific recommendations on verification and monitoring.
- The UK government and the European Union should put pressure on Israel to achieve Israeli compliance with and ratification of the NPT, CWC, BTWC and support negotiation of a FMCT.
- The UK government and the EU should actively support and promote a WMD-free zone in the Middle East
- Israel's development of military space technology should be actively opposed by the UK government and the EU.
- An embargo must be imposed on the sale of all UK and EU relevant military equipment to, and purchases from Israel and all military contacts are broken off until Israel's compliance is achieved.
- There should be full freedom for Mordechai Vanunu.

We are grateful to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament which carried out much of the research supporting this fact sheet.  
[www.cnduk.org](http://www.cnduk.org)



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2 [www.nogw.com/ilweapons.html](http://www.nogw.com/ilweapons.html)

3 Applied Research Institute in Jerusalem, 3 October 2008: <http://tinyurl.com/2cdgb9c>

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5 Monterey Institute of International Studies, *ibid*.

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19 NATO Online Library (2005): *Speech in Israel by Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer*, February 24th 2005 at [www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions\\_21965.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_21965.htm)

20 Asmus R.D and Jackson Bruce W.P (2005): 'Does Israel belong to the EU and NATO?', *Policy Review*, Feb/Mar.

21 In a recent wide-ranging poll conducted in Arab countries, 88% of respondents felt threatened by Israel, 77% by the US, only 10% by Iran. See <http://tinyurl.com/2emcv4l>.

22 Turner M (2002): *Arming the Occupation: Israel and the Arms Trade*, Campaign Against the Arms Trade, London at [www.caat.org.uk/resources/publications/countries/israel-1002.php](http://www.caat.org.uk/resources/publications/countries/israel-1002.php)