"Israel's Nuclear Weapons Pose a Threat to Peace," *Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 20 (July 1990), p. 10

by Gordon Welty
Wright State University
Dayton, OH 45435

The Cold War is being consigned to the trash-heap of history. Americans are debating the possible uses of the "peace dividend." Nonetheless, several nuclear threats remain and must be recognized in the interests of global peace and regional stability. The Israeli nuclear-weapons stockpile presents one of these threats to Middle East peace.

As early as April 12, 1976, *Time* magazine suggested that Israel had a dozen nuclear bombs, which had been readied for use during the October 1973 War. But all reports of Israel's nuclear weapons proliferation were brushed aside, masked by that government's claim that it "would not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East."

On October 5, 1986, the *Sunday Times* of London published "The Secrets of Israel's Nuclear Arsenal," based on documentation provided by Mordechai Vanunu. This Israeli nuclear technician had worked for a decade at Dimona, the super-secret nuclear facility in the Negev Desert. Vanunu's photographs and testimony were sufficient to convince nuclear experts in Europe and America that Israel had one hundred or two hundred nuclear bombs.

Vanunu had several reasons for his revelations about Dimona. He opposed the introduction of nuclear weapons into the already volatile Middle East. His was an act of the deepest conscience. He wanted Israelis to begin a public discussion about the entire question of peace and, particularly, the continued escalation of the arms race between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

After submitting his documentation to the *Sunday Times*, Vanunu was lured from Britain to Italy by Israeli Mossad agents, where he was injected with drugs in Rome and kidnapped. He was carried by ship to Israel, where he was put on trial for espionage and treason. Although he was held in strict isolation, he managed to outwit his captors and reveal to reporters the details of his kidnapping from Rome.

His trial was a charade of justice. He had no jury. The press and outside observers, including his family, were barred from the proceedings. Predictably, he was convicted in March 1988 of treason and espionage, and sentenced to eighteen years in prison.

There are two directions in which the Vanunu case leads. One is the problem of Israeli violations of human rights and the sovereignty of nations. The kidnapping of Vanunu and his subsequent trial constituted violations of his human rights. He is clearly one of the great prisoners of conscience of our age. Little wonder dozens of members of the European Parliament nominated him for the Andre Sakharov Award, along with Nelson Mandela.

The kidnapping from Italy by Mossad constitutes a violation of the sovereignty of that country. But Israel's nuclear weapons program was based on the theft of fissionable materials from Pennsylvania, and was already a violation of American sovereignty.

The other direction, then, is the United States' response to Israel's nuclear proliferation. Our own
Senator John Glenn has seriously questioned whether Pakistan is in treaty violation, whether Pakistan should continue to receive U.S. aid, because Pakistan has been developing a nuclear bomb. What then about Israel? The law is the law.

If Israel has nuclear bombs, then what about an "Islamic bomb"? And what about an "Arab bomb"? Proliferation is a many-headed monster.

There are further problems of militarism and arms proliferation. Bush administration spokesperson Marlin Fitzwater recently said that Libya's alleged mustard gas production is "dangerous," requiring "heightened international vigilance" and "vigorous efforts to stop the operation." Chemical weapons have been called "the poor man's atomic bomb."

But what about Israel? An Israeli specialist who is in a position to know recently confided to me that "whether or not Israel has nuclear weapons, it has chemical weapons." Again, how can the United States insist on one country's disarmament, when we allow or even facilitate another country's armament?

Nuclear proliferation and international banditry must end, along with the Cold War. We should write our Senators and Representatives, our State Department, and the Israeli Embassy demanding justice and freedom for Mordechai Vanunu.

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