Should Israel Alter its Policy of Nuclear Ambiguity?

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Abstract

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Since its inception, Israel's nuclear program has evolved into a vital component of its national security strategy. At the core of Israel's nuclear program is its policy of nuclear ambiguity. Israel's nuclear ambiguity is comprised of secrecy and signaling, and through an effective combination of the two elements, Israel has maximized its deterrence advantages while minimizing the adverse political, military, and diplomatic ramifications of its nuclear program. As such, Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity has been successful for five decades.

However, given the current international environment, some experts argue that Israel should disclose its nuclear capabilities, deliberately ending its nuclear ambiguity policy. This thesis examines Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity and attempts to determine if it remains a valuable element in Israel's defense strategy. The purpose of this discussion is to answer the question: "Should Israel maintain its policy of nuclear ambiguity?"

Chapter one discusses the development of Israel's nuclear program and the evolution of Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity. This chapter focuses largely on the piecemeal manner in which both Israel's nuclear program and nuclear policies were developed and addresses the US's influence in the process. Chapter two examines four critical elements in Israel's nuclear policy, for a deeper examination of the main arguments for maintaining Israel's current nuclear policies or shifting to a declared nuclear posture. These categories are: 1) Israel's strategic deterrence, 2) the potential for a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race, 3) the ongoing Arab-Israel peace process, and, 4) the strength of the US-Israel relationship. Chapter three discusses the current international environment, such as
ongoing nuclear weapons programs in the Middle East and the international non-proliferation agenda, and their effect on Israel's nuclear posture.

This thesis evaluates the history, present and possible futures of Israel's nuclear weapons policy. With a clear understanding of the influences that have led Israel to its current nuclear status, it is possible to assess the likelihood of a shift in Israel's nuclear policy from ambiguity to an open stance.
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Introduction: Israel as a Nuclear Weapons State

Throughout its history, Israel has faced a series of hostile enemies who have refused to recognize Israel’s right to exist and posed a serious (and sometimes existential) threat towards the Jewish state. As a result of this environment, Israel’s defense strategy is crucial. In addition to Israel’s unique position as the only Jewish, democratic country in the Middle East, Israel is at a strategic disadvantage due to its small geographic size, high population density and large number of valuable targets. Furthermore, many countries that Israel might have to fight are believed to be developing or are in possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and some have directly threatened Israel with use of these WMDs.¹

To ensure its survival, Israel has developed a superior defense capability and has continuously worked to stay a step ahead of its adversaries, both through conventional and non-conventional methods. Israel’s nuclear program and nuclear ambiguity policies often are discussed as an integral part of Israel’s advanced strategic capabilities.²

Many experts consider Israel to be in possession of a nuclear weapons capability, despite Israel’s refusal to acknowledge its nuclear program. Maintaining secrecy during the development of nuclear weapons is not unique to Israel. In fact, all nuclear weapons states developed their nuclear programs with varying degrees of covertness. However, the decision to refrain from acknowledging the existence of nuclear weapons once they are developed is unique to Israel. Israel has never confirmed or denied whether it possesses nuclear weapons. This posture, often referred to as nuclear ambiguity, is one of the key elements of Israel’s strategic posture. “Israel was the first country to decide to

¹ Brown, Israel and the WMD Threat: Lessons for Europe
build nuclear weapons but not declare their possession, first through a policy of denial, rather through ambiguity, that evolved into opacity.”\(^3\) In essence, Israel is the sixth nation in the world to acquire nuclear weapons and the first nation in the Middle East.\(^4\)

In this thesis I will examine Israel’s policies of nuclear ambiguity and attempt to determine if these policies remain a valuable element in Israel’s defense strategy. To answer this question, I have divided my thesis into three sections: Chapter one, titled “Israel’s Policy of Nuclear Ambiguity,” discusses the development of Israel’s nuclear program and the evolution of Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity. This chapter focuses largely on the piecemeal manner in which both Israel’s nuclear program and nuclear policies were developed and addresses the US’s role in influencing the process. Chapter two, titled “Nuclear Ambiguity versus Nuclear Disclosure,” examines four categories which are the critical elements in Israel’s current nuclear policies. In this chapter I will evaluate the impact these four categories have on Israel’s nuclear posture and discuss the main arguments for maintaining Israel’s current nuclear policies or shifting to a declared nuclear posture. Chapter three, entitled "Looking Forward: Nuclear War or Nuclear Disarmament?" discusses the current international environment and its affect on Israel’s nuclear posture. Ongoing nuclear weapons programs and the international non-proliferation agenda, have a significant impact on the likelihood that Israel will transition to a new nuclear posture.

In these three chapters, I evaluate the history, present and possible futures of Israel’s nuclear weapons policy. With a clear understanding of the influences that have led Israel

\(^3\) Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, p.343

\(^4\) Ibid., pp.1, 277-291
to its current nuclear status, I believe that it is possible to assess the likelihood of a shift in Israel’s nuclear policy from ambiguity to an open stance.

It should be noted that many experts distinguish between nuclear ‘ambiguity’ and nuclear ‘opacity’ as separate phases in Israel’s nuclear policy path. ‘Ambiguity’ often refers to Israel’s efforts to achieve nuclear capabilities and the political need to conceal them, before fully acquiring nuclear weapons. ‘Opacity’ often refers to Israel’s current status as an undeclared nuclear weapon state and its deliberate decision not to assume an open nuclear posture.\(^5\) Although I believe these distinctions are useful when evaluating Israel’s nuclear journey, due to the length of this thesis and for the purpose of evaluating Israel’s current policies, I will use the terms ambiguity and opacity interchangeably.

To be sure, the rationale in disclosing Israel’s nuclear weapons would not lie in stating the obvious, but in an informed decision and acceptance that Israel would benefit from such a move.\(^6\) The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether or not Israel would indeed benefit from a transition in its nuclear posture.

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Chapter I

Israel’s Policy of Nuclear Ambiguity
Chapter I: Israel’s Policy of Nuclear Ambiguity

“In attaining nuclear capability the Israelis had to hide what they were up to from the eyes of the world, in order to avoid provoking the curiosity of the international inspection bodies whose task it is to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weaponry. This was no less a difficult task than the actual achievement of the nuclear option.”7

The Development of Israel’s Nuclear Program

The state of Israel was created in the aftermath of two significant and traumatic historic events: the Holocaust and Israel’s War of Independence in 1948. These events provide the context for Israel’s early pursuit of nuclear weapons. By the end of the war in 1949, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s Prime Minster, believed that the Jewish state faced a monolithic Arab world, united in its hatred of Israel. He believed that the conflict was rooted in the Arabs’ rejection of Israel, coupled with their extensive defeat during the war, which provided the Arabs with a strong ideological and practical need to annihilate Israel. This formed Ben-Gurion’s view of the existential threats Israel faced.8

The armistice agreements that Israel signed with some of the Arab states after the war did not alleviate Ben-Gurion’s fears of the Arab threat. He felt that the Arabs had entered into the agreements due to their military defeat and concluded that Israel had only achieved a lengthy truce, which would be broken as soon as the Arabs had the military superiority to destroy Israel.9

8 Cohen, Israel and Chemical/Biological Weapons: History, Deterrence and Arms Control, pp.28-29; Shalom, Israel’s Nuclear Option, pp.1-10
9 Shalom, Israel’s Nuclear Option, pp.1-10, 168-170
Ben-Gurion believed that Israel’s conventional military strength would be insufficient if the two sides entered into a long war. Israel could not afford to be dependent on other states and security guarantees or close ties with superpowers would not suffice. Instead, Israel would have to rely on an independent deterrent capability in order convince the Arabs that any aggression that threatened Israel’s survival would be met with an incalculable response. Based on these considerations, Ben-Gurion concluded that the only way to maintain Israel’s military dominance and ensure Israel’s survival would be by possessing the ‘ultimate weapon.’ Thus, the nuclear option was chosen as Israel’s best solution.10

Israel’s initial nuclear activities began in the early 1950’s. In 1952 Ben-Gurion replaced the Defense Ministry’s existing Division of Research and Infrastructure11 with the Israel Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC). More than two years passed before the IAEC’s existence became public knowledge, and even once the IAEC was acknowledged, the work it conducted was kept secret within the Defense Ministry.12 In essence, the IAEC was largely unknown to both the Israeli government and the Israeli public.13

Domestically, Ben-Gurion faced some criticism and opposition his plans. Some political and military elites were very critical of Ben-Gurion’s desire for nuclear weapons and objected to the project and the manner of its conduction. Despite this, Ben-Gurion

10 Ibid.
11 The Division of Research and Infrastructure was known by its Hebrew acronym: EMET.
12 No legislation accompanied the establishment of the IAEC and to date Israel lacks any open legislation or guidelines regarding its nuclear policies. I will discuss this point further in chapter three.
and the project’s proponents successfully pursued their goals until the project’s critics reluctantly came to accept its existence.\textsuperscript{14} \textsuperscript{15}

Israel received its first nuclear facility from the United States (US) as a result of the 1955 US Atomic Energy Act. Once passed, the act enabled the US to enter into nuclear cooperation with other countries for peaceful purposes. Consequently, the US signed an Atoms for Peace Agreement with Israel and provided Israel with a 5-megawatt nuclear research center at Nahal Soreq that began operating in 1960. Nahal Soreq’s official mission is nuclear research and training and to date, it is the only Israeli nuclear facility that operates under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. Some reports suggest that Nahal Soreq is also a nuclear weapons research and design facility; however there is no credible information to verify this assertion.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite Israel’s initial nuclear cooperation with the US, most experts credit Israel’s nuclear cooperation with France as the driving force of Israel’s nuclear program. The Israel-France relationship developed simultaneously while Israel was engaged in nuclear cooperation with the US, and it led to the establishment of Israel’s Dimona facility. Estimates differ on exactly when the Israel-France nuclear cooperation agreement was signed. Some experts believe that the agreement was signed in the first half of 1953 and made public in November 1954. Other experts believe that two formal accords on the practicalities of the France-Israel nuclear cooperation, one of a political and one of a technical nature, were concluded in December 1956 and October 1957. Despite experts’ disagreement regarding the timeline of the Israel-France agreement, there is a consensus

\textsuperscript{14} Although few domestic voices within Israel dispute the existence of Israel’s nuclear program, some still oppose Israel’s policies and conduct regarding the issue. I will discuss this further in chapter three.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Karpin, \textit{The Bomb in the Basement: How Israel Went Nuclear and What That Means for the World}, pp.51-56; IISS, \textit{Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran}, pp.130-133
of opinion that some of the details were outlined in an official exchange of letters between Israel and France, however, the sensitive elements of the agreement remained in the form of verbal understandings.\(^\text{17}\)

Based on the France-Israel nuclear cooperation agreement, France agreed to supply Israel with the technical assistance and uranium Israel required for a nuclear reactor and plutonium production facility. The project’s official goal was peaceful nuclear energy research and the facility was constructed in Israel’s Negev Nuclear Research Center, in the town of Dimona.\(^\text{18}\)

A few years after the France-Israel nuclear cooperation began, relations between the two countries began to shift. In 1960 France requested that Israel unequivocally commit to refrain from using the plutonium for military purposes and agree to international supervision. Israel rejected France’s request and as a result, France informed Israel that following a transitional period of a few months, France would suspend its assistance on the nuclear project and terminate its supply of uranium to Israel.\(^\text{19}\)

Israel immediately engaged France in a series of intense negotiations in order to maintain the project’s viability. As a compromise, France announced that the government would end its direct involvement in Israel’s nuclear project, but would allow French companies with existing contracts to continue their work. As a result, work on

\(^{17}\text{Cohen, Israel and the Bomb, pp.57-60; Farr, The Third Temple’s Holy of Holies: Israel’s Nuclear Weapons, pp.3-15; IISS, Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran, pp.119-120, 130-133; Jabber, Israel and Nuclear Weapons: Present Option and Future Strategies, pp.1-38; Shalom, Israel’s Nuclear Option, pp.1-10}\)

\(^{18}\text{Cohen, Israel and the Bomb, pp.57-60; Shalom, Israel’s Nuclear Option, pp.1-10}\)

\(^{19}\text{Ibid.}\)
Israel’s Dimona reactor continued after a short delay, and experts assess that the 26-megawatt nuclear reactor went critical in 1962 or 1963.20

In addition to its cooperation with the US and France, Israel is suspected of quietly developing nuclear cooperation relationships with Argentina, Belgium, Gabon, Niger, Norway, South Africa, and the United Kingdom (UK), all of which assisted Israel in assembling its piecemeal nuclear program. As a result of Israel’s many relationships, it was able to develop its nuclear program in an improvised fashion, depending upon chance and opportunity, in addition to ambition and expertise. Essentially, Israel seized and exploited every opportunity to acquire information or materials.21

Based on the France-Israel nuclear cooperation agreement, France agreed to build a 26-megawatt plutonium reactor and reprocessing facility capable of producing 10-15 kilograms of plutonium a year. However, reports released in the 1970’s and 1980’s estimated that Israel’s nuclear capacity was more advanced. Although the information was not publicly available at the time, in 1967 the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) assessed that Israel had a minimum of two deliverable nuclear bombs and in 1972 the CIA assessed that Israel had 10-20 nuclear weapons. Furthermore, in an article published in the UK in 1986, Mordechai Vanunu, a former Dimona technician, divulged some details regarding Israel’s Dimona reactor. Vanunu claimed that the Dimona reactor had been upgraded to 70-megawatts sometime before 1976 and was upgraded again to 125-150 megawatts by 1986. Additionally, Vanunu claimed that Israel had produced approximately 200 kilograms of plutonium by 1975, another 300 kilograms between the

21 Ibid.
years 1976-1985, and an estimated additional 300 kilograms of plutonium after 1985. This amounts to about 900 kilograms, or enough plutonium for 200 nuclear weapons. Although the information provided by Vanunu has never been verified, many experts have utilized this information in order to estimate Israel’s nuclear capabilities.22

In light of the scarcity of information, it is difficult to evaluate the cost of Israel’s nuclear program. In 1995, Israeli Prime Minister, Simon Peres, estimated that the 1960 nuclear reactor alone cost about $80 million US dollars (USD). Other experts have estimated the reactor’s cost at over $300 million USD. The large discrepancy between these two figures leaves many questions unanswered. However, during the 1950’s and 1960’s the research and development (R&D) portion of Israel’s defense budget grew from less than two percent to approximately 15 percent of Israel’s total defense budget. Based on this information, it is apparent that Israel’s nuclear program maintained a high priority status within the Defense Ministry.23

Some experts question whether Israel does indeed have a nuclear weapon. This is based on the fact that Israel has not announced its nuclear capabilities, and is not known to have conducted the necessary and extensive testing required for nuclear weapons. Some analysts have speculated that a signal detected in the South Atlantic in 1979 by a US monitoring satellite was the result of a low-yield Israeli nuclear test, possibly from a tactical nuclear weapon or from the fission of a thermonuclear device. These analysts

23 Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, pp.66-67
assume that the test was conducted with the assistance of South Africa. However, no conclusive evidence was published from the US investigation.\textsuperscript{24}

Nevertheless, in light of the analysis and estimates discussed above, Israel is generally regarded by experts in the nuclear field as a \textit{de facto} nuclear weapons state.\textsuperscript{25} Furthermore, Israel is now considered to be the only country in the world that has nuclear weapons, but does not declare so.\textsuperscript{26}

Current estimates of Israel’s stockpile vary. Israel is typically considered to have between 100-400 nuclear weapons,\textsuperscript{27} in addition to chemical and biological weapons.\textsuperscript{28} Some experts estimate that Israel has thermonuclear weapons; however, assessments vary in this regard. Israel is also considered to have a variety of delivery systems, including ballistic missiles, nuclear-capable submarines, long-range fighter jets and space launch vehicles, which allow Israel to cover a range of up to 4,800 kilometers with payloads of up to 1,000 kilograms.\textsuperscript{29} Based on these analyses, Israel has the capability to launch nuclear weapons from land, sea and air, and Israel most likely has a second-strike capability as well.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{25} For the purposes of this thesis, I will refer to Israel as a nuclear weapon state.
\textsuperscript{26} Melman, \textit{Loss of Nuclear Monopoly – An Israeli Nightmare}
\textsuperscript{27} For example, Mordechai Vanunu has estimated that Israel could have up to 200 nuclear warheads; David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) has estimated that Israel could have 100-130 nuclear weapons; the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has estimated that Israel could have 100-200 nuclear warheads; and Jane’s Intelligence Review has estimated up to 400 nuclear weapons.
\textsuperscript{28} Israel’s biological and chemical weapons programs are treated with similar secrecy as its nuclear weapons program and its policies are stricter than Israel’s nuclear ambiguity policies.
\textsuperscript{29} Israel’s Shavit space launch vehicle can be modified to carry nuclear weapons with a range of 7,800 kilometers.
\textsuperscript{30} Brown, \textit{Israel and the WMD Threat: Lessons for Europe}; Cohen, \textit{Israel and Chemical/Biological Weapons: History, Deterrence and Arms Control}, pp.37-40; Ware, \textit{Nuclear Stockpiles}; IISS, \textit{Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran}, pp.120-124, 130-134
Although Israel’s exact nuclear capabilities remain unknown, public officials often refer indirectly to Israel’s nuclear status in their statements. For example, in December 2006, Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert publicly hinted at Israel’s nuclear program when responding to a question regarding Iran’s nuclear activity: “Israel is a democracy, Israel doesn't threaten any country with anything, never did. 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 [Iran is] aspiring to have nuclear weapons, as America, France, Israel, and Russia?”

In another example, during a Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) conference in February 2004, US Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld hinted at Israel’s nuclear capabilities by stating that: “Israel has opined that it would prefer not to be put into the sea and as a result, over a period of decades, it has arranged itself so it hasn’t been put in the sea.”

In spite of these and similar statements, as well as experts’ analyses that Israel does in fact have a nuclear weapons capability, Israel’s status as a nuclear weapon state remains within the realm of educated speculation: Israel has never confirmed its nuclear capabilities and maintains a strict policy of nuclear ambiguity, which I will discuss further below.

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31 Lake, *America Has Protected Israeli Nuclear Program for 40 Years*
The Evolution of Israel’s Ambiguity Policies

Israel practiced secrecy and adhered to an unofficial policy of nuclear ambiguity from the outset of its program. As a result, it remains unclear exactly if and when Israel crossed critical junctions along its nuclear path. “The Dimona project was vulnerable from the start… Secrecy and concealment were designed to minimize the vulnerability of the project, which they did. In time, [secrecy and concealment] became habitual.”33

From its early establishment, the Dimona operation was so secret that very few people knew the entire truth. As previously mentioned, in 1954, knowledge of the Defense Ministry’s IAEC became public, however, its work was never disclosed. In December 1960, ten years after the beginning of the project, Ben-Gurion informed the Knesset34 that a 24-megawatt research reactor was under construction in Dimona for peaceful purposes. That is the only known instance in which an Israeli prime minister has publicly spoken about the Dimona facility.35

In spite of the lack of public information, Western intelligence agencies began suspecting Israel was developing nuclear capabilities by the late 1950’s. In March 1958, US intelligence agencies identified large facilities southeast of Be’er Sheva and requested an explanation for the structures. Israel initially replied that the facilities were textile factories and later identified the buildings as metallurgical research facilities. Unsatisfied with this response, US officials began to push Israel for inspections and clarifications on the facilities, which Israel evaded. In December 1960, Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA reported in a secret memorandum that Israel was constructing a nuclear complex which

33 Cohen, Israel and the Bomb, p.60
34 Israeli Parliament
35 Cohen, Israel and the Bomb, pp.12-13, 59, 79-97; Feldman, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East, pp.95-97; IISS, Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran, p.120
appeared capable of producing plutonium for military purposes. The CIA estimated the project’s cost at $40-$80 million USD.\textsuperscript{36}

As a result of these estimates, the US repeated its concern regarding the nature of Israel’s program and pressed Israel for answers. Relations between the two countries became strained as they entered into a series of intensive negotiations. In addition to demanding answers, the US insisted that Israel provide the US with guarantees on the project’s objectives and implement mechanisms for international monitoring. The British government made similar attempts to acquire information about Israel’s nuclear project. Both nations were met with similar responses: Israel provided a few clarifications, however most answers were worded vaguely in order to avoid inaccuracies while simultaneously concealing information Israel did not wish to share.\textsuperscript{37}

Under pressure, Israel conceded to US inspections and in May 1961, two American scientists visited Dimona. Their visit was closely supervised and limited to predetermined locations within the facility. The scientists’ report concluded that while the reactor would eventually produce “small quantities of plutonium suitable for weapons, there is no present evidence that the Israelis have weapons production in mind.”\textsuperscript{38} Unsatisfied with the results of the inspection, the US continued to press Israel for information regarding its project and international monitoring mechanisms. As a result, Ben-Gurion conceded to US pressure and reached an understanding with US President John F. Kennedy, according to which Israel would allow US representatives to tour the Dimona facility twice a year once the reactor became operational. However,

\textsuperscript{36} Cohen, \textit{Israel and the Bomb}, pp.82-85; Shalom, \textit{Israel’s Nuclear Option}, pp.11-13
\textsuperscript{37} Shalom, \textit{Israel’s Nuclear Option}, pp.13-21
\textsuperscript{38} Cohen, \textit{Israel and the Bomb}, p.106
Israel refused any IAEA monitoring arrangements unless the Arab nations that were also conducting nuclear research agreed to monitoring arrangements as well.\textsuperscript{39}

US-Israel affairs during Dimona’s early developments had a significant impact on both governments’ priorities and policies. Israel’s priority was to reduce US pressure while enabling the completion of the project. Ben-Gurion sought to appease the US government and avoid formal inspections or confrontation, without lying. As a result, Israel utilized vagueness to cover for its actions. The US was skeptical of Israel’s intentions; however its priority was to avoid tension or confrontation on the issue. As a result, the US’s actions and policies were inconsistent and Israel’s nuclear program was temporarily taken off the US’s agenda.\textsuperscript{40}

Two years later, by 1963, Israel’s nuclear program had returned to the top of the US’s non-proliferation agenda. The US resumed its pressure on Israel for access to Dimona, in order to evaluate the nature of the project. Initially, Ben-Gurion stalled US inspections by claiming that it was unnecessary to conduct visits before the reactor became critical in 1964. Later, Israel impeded US visits by postponing them or allowing inspectors only partial access. Consequentially, between the years 1963 and 1967 Israel repeatedly evaded US’s efforts to learn more about Dimona and as a result, all US inspections concluded that Israel had not developed the capability for producing nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{41}

Evidence suggests that US intelligence agencies knew more about the Dimona project than the inspectors discovered. However, US officials were pessimistic about their

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\textsuperscript{39} Shalom, \textit{Israel’s Nuclear Option}, pp.24-32  
\textsuperscript{40} Cohen, \textit{Israel and the Bomb}, pp.95-97  
ability to stop Israel’s nuclear program, especially without a corresponding move by Egypt. Additionally, US officials were hesitant to publicize information regarding Israel’s nuclear activities, out of concern that it would cause the Arab states to turn to the Soviet Union for nuclear armament. As such, they decided not to press the issue too far.42

Israel’s evasion techniques successfully avoided compromise and confrontation with the US and international community simultaneously. On one hand, Israel repeatedly stated that it had no intention of developing a nuclear weapons capability. On the other hand, Israel often stated that it would not allow itself to fall behind the Arab states, nor could Israel accept US security guarantees as an alternative to an independent deterrence capability. These two postures formed the beginnings of Israel’s nuclear ambiguity.43

Systematic efforts to formulate Israel’s nuclear policies were minimal until the mid-1960’s. Israeli strategists formed Israel’s nuclear posture, which mainly consisted of a general unwillingness to address the issue. They determined that Israel’s nuclear ambiguity would rest on assumptions that would be encouraged through leaks and rumors. However, Israel would not engage in any formal discussions of its nuclear stance.44

Many credit Israel’s Prime Minister Levi Eshkol with first codifying Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity. Building upon Ben-Gurion’s strategy of vagueness, in a 1964 speech Eshkol stated that Israel would ‘not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Cohen, Israel and the Bomb, pp.235-239; IISS, Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran, p.128
the Middle East,45 a phrase which has often been repeated since its first use. It is noteworthy that Israel’s posture of nuclear ambiguity as defined in 1963, no longer mentioned the “peaceful purposes” of Israel’s nuclear program. “This simple and brief formulation was in fact a work of genius in its very ambiguity, in that it reveals nothing but says everything.”46 47

Israel’s nuclear stance of ambiguity allowed it to target three audiences simultaneously: it provided deterrence against Israel’s enemies, it allowed Israel to maintain a responsible posture towards friendly nations, and it supplied the Israeli population with a boost of self-confidence regarding their security. The central component of Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity is the word ‘introduce.’ Israel has asserted that this refers to a tested nuclear device. As such, Israel could possess an assembled but untested nuclear device without breaking its commitment.48 In contrast, the US has stated that it views possession of a physically assembled nuclear device as introduction. This discrepancy has remained a point of contention.49

The first time Israel’s nuclear ambiguity posture was enshrined in writing occurred in early 1965. Prime Minister Eshkol and US President Lyndon B. Johnson concluded a memorandum of understanding (MOU) based on three issues: (1) Israel would not initiate a preventive war against the Arabs; (2) Israel would not divert water from the Arabs; and

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45 There is some disagreement as to when this statement was first used. It appears that Eshkol used the statement in 1963, but it was first repeated as an official statement in 1964.
48 Israel has never spoken about the issue referring to itself specifically. Instead, Israel speaks about it issue in general terms and refers to ‘states.’
49 Ibid.
(3) Israel would reaffirm that it will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the region. In return for Israel’s commitment, the US agreed to assist Israel with its conventional military needs. More importantly, Israel viewed the wording of the MOU, which did not limit Israel’s freedom of action in any significant manner, as a sign that the White House affirmed Israel’s right to the Dimona project and that the project’s ongoing viability was assured.50

The shift in stance, from the Kennedy administration, which took a firmer approach to Israel’s nuclear program, to the Johnson administration, which was more lenient, was most likely the result of Egypt’s ongoing military buildup and the escalating tension in the Middle East during the Cold War. The US’s posture shifted even more with US President Richard Nixon’s administration. After Israel’s 1967 Six Day War and by the end of the 1960’s, the US recognized that Israel viewed its nuclear program as the highest national interest and no Israeli leadership would willingly surrender it. As a result, the Nixon administration unofficially granted Israel’s nuclear program with retroactive legitimacy. This decision was based on the calculation that the US would benefit from its ability to persuade Israel to maintain its nuclear program under conditions that were favorable to the US.51

As a result of the US’s desire to maintain Israel’s nuclear program under favorable conditions, the US utilized its influence over Israel to reinforce Israel’s commitment not to be the first nation to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. In a verbal

50 Aronson, Brosh, The Policies and Strategy of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East: Opacity, Theory and Reality, 1960-1991, pp.103-104; Barnaby, Capping Israel’s Nuclear Volcano, p.105; Cohen, Israel and the Bomb, pp.206-208; IISS, Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran, p.125; Shalom, Israel’s Nuclear Option, pp.102, 116-127
understanding between Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and President Nixon in 1969, Israel committed not to conduct any nuclear experiments and maintain its unclear nuclear status, by refraining from acknowledging the presence of nuclear weapons on its soil. In essence, Israel agreed not to defy the US or undermine its ongoing Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) negotiations, and in return, the US agreed not to pressure Israel into any inspections or international non-proliferation regimes. Thus, the US’s response to Israel’s nuclear program, which took on a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ tone, reached a turning point and Israel was allowed to its nuclear bomb.52

As discussed, Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity enabled it to develop nuclear weapons capabilities while preventing a confrontation with the US and without encouraging the Arabs to follow suit. However, the policy also had its drawbacks. Israel’s ambiguous posture forced Israel to deceive the US, its closest ally, and did not allow Israel to translate its capabilities into open deterrence. Furthermore, the project’s lack of clearly defined objectives and organizational coherence made progress difficult at times. However it was these challenges, which ultimately contributed to the formation of Israel’s nuclear policies and responses to the international community.53

“The US response to Israel’s nuclear program in the 1960’s was probably the most critical determinant of the direction of Israel’s nuclear policy.”54 By the early 1970’s US pressure on Israel’s nuclear program decreased and US visits to Dimona stopped. This was based on a number of calculations, including Israel’s role as an ally in the Middle East during the Cold War, the influence of the Jewish vote, and the relationship between the lessons of the Holocaust and Israel’s need for a strong defense system. Thus,

52 Ibid.
53 Cohen, Israel and the Bomb, pp.280-281
54 IISS, Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran, p.122
although the US failed to prevent Israel’s nuclear program, the US was influential in forcing Israel to develop its nuclear weapons opaquely.\textsuperscript{55}

In the aftermath of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel determined that it would limit the use of nuclear weapons to a last resort: “only [for] circumstances in which Israel’s very survival was at stake.”\textsuperscript{56} \textsuperscript{57} This doctrine of maintaining a ‘bomb-in-the-basement,’ which is often referred to as the Samson Option, had been previously presented by Prime Minister Eshkol. However it became a permanent element of Israel’s nuclear policies under Prime Minister Meir in the mid-1970’s.\textsuperscript{58}

Israel’s nuclear stance shifted again in the 1980’s, when Israel adopted the Begin Doctrine as part of its nuclear policies. In June 1981, Israel attacked Iraq's Osiraq nuclear reactor, prior to the reactor’s completion. In a surprise raid, eight Israeli F-16 aircraft flew 1,000 kilometers into Arab territory and dropped 16 tons of high explosives on the site, destroying the reactor completely. Two days later Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin held a press conference, declaring that Israel would never allow its enemies to develop or acquire WMDs that could be used against Israel. This was the first time Israel took an active stance towards a policy that some experts have titled a doctrine of ‘opaque nuclear monopoly.’\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{56} IISS, \textit{Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran}, p.124
\textsuperscript{57} Israeli military strategists had been considering a scenario of total annihilation, called “mikre hakol,” or “everything scenario” since Israel’s establishment. However it was only in the 1970’s that they determined that Israel’s nuclear capabilities would be reserved for this event.
Israel’s opaque nuclear monopoly doctrine is based on the viewpoint that Israel cannot tolerate another nuclear power within the Middle East. In order to avoid such a scenario, Israel will conduct offensive preventive strikes against the enemy’s nuclear infrastructure before its enemies develop or acquire nuclear capabilities. In 1981 Israel’s Minister of Defense, Ariel Sharon, explained this strategy: “Israel cannot allow the introduction of nuclear weapons [into the region]. For us it is not an issue of a balance of terror, but a question of our continued survival. Therefore we shall have to prevent this danger from the onset.”60 By adopting the Began Doctrine, combined with its existing policy of nuclear ambiguity, Israel defined its desired status as a nuclear monopoly in the Middle East.61

In September 2007 Israel reaffirmed its commitment to the Begin Doctrine, when seven Israeli62 aircraft executed an attack on Syria’s al-Kibar reactor, destroying the nearly completed nuclear reactor that had been secretly63 under construction. While Israel’s strike in Syria was similar to its strike in Iraq, reactions to the Syrian attack were very different. In stark contrast to Israel’s press conference in 1981, Israel imposed an information blackout, in conjunction with a similar US silence.64 The majority of the international community, including Israel’s Arab neighbors, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), also remained mum on the issue. Further, although the IAEA’s Director General, Mohamed ElBaradei, issued a disapproving statement, he did not challenge Israel’s right to pre-emptive self-

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61 Ibid., pp.170-180
62 Israel has never officially confirmed the action in Syria; however, it is generally attributed to Israel.
63 Syria has never acknowledged its possession of a nuclear facility; however, a CIA report released several months after Israel’s attack confirmed that the reactor had been built with North Korean assistance and was intended to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.
64 US silence was broken in April 2008 when the CIA released its detailed report mentioned above.
defense. Some experts have suggested that this silence regarding Israel’s attack in Syria can be construed as tacit approval of these tactics, and as such, the international community has accepted Israel’s status as an opaque nuclear monopoly in the Middle East.65

In the wake of Israel’s Osirak attack in 1981 and Vanunu’s revelations in 1986, Israel began reducing its nuclear ambiguity through veiled acknowledgments of its nuclear weapons program. For example, in 1981 Israel’s former Defense Minister and Foreign Minister, Moshe Dayan, described Israel’s nuclear status by stating: “We don’t have any nuclear bombs now. But we have the capacity, we can do that in a short time…”66 Similarly, during the 1990 Gulf War, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir’s government responded to Iraqi threats with statements that were often understood as hints that Israel would launch a nuclear strike if it were hit with chemical weapons.67

Israel’s current status of reduced ambiguity consists primarily of official statements with clear references that reaffirm Israel’s ability to fully defend itself against a severe or existential threat. Israel’s shift towards reduced ambiguity has increased significantly over the past few years as existential threats have emerged from Iran. For example, in May 2009 during a visit to Washington DC, Israeli Brigadier General Michael Herzog stated: “When we say a nuclear Iran is unacceptable, we mean it… When we say all options are on the table, we mean it.”68 Nevertheless, Israel has refrained from going beyond statements of reduced opacity, in order to maintain its agreements with the US on

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66 Feldman, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East, p.101
67 Feldman, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East, pp.100-104; Farr, The Third Temple’s Holy of Holies: Israel’s Nuclear Weapons, p.16
68 NTI, Israel Promises to Warn US of Strike on Iran
the issue of nuclear disclosure. Thus, Israel continues to uphold its commitment not to be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East.69

Israel’s Current Policies of Ambiguity

Israel’s policy of not introducing nuclear weapons into the Middle East is the trademark of Israel’s commitment to nuclear non-proliferation, and many public officials have reaffirmed this declaration since its initial use. To enhance Israel’s deterrence, some officials add that “Israel will not be the second country either.”70 This addendum, which consists of both a promise and a threat, is most likely intended to signal to the Arab states that they will never enjoy a nuclear monopoly in the Middle East.71

Despite regional and political changes throughout the decades since the inception of Israel’s nuclear program, the core doctrine of Israel’s nuclear policies has remained the same: vagueness and secrecy. Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity has served three major purposes: (1) it provided effective deterrence through uncertainty; (2) it avoided tension with US nuclear policies; and (3) it prevented clashes with international non-proliferation norms.72

Most Israeli officials view Israel’s nuclear opacity as a vital component of national security. In June 1998, reports surfaced which stated that some policy-makers, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Minister of Defense Yitzhak Mordechai, and

70 Evron, Israel’s Nuclear Dilemma, p.251
72 Feldman, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East, pp.97-99
Foreign Minister David Levy, were engaged in a formal review of Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity. They determined that it was in Israel’s best interest maintain its current nuclear posture. It is unclear if another review has since taken place. What is clear, however, is that regardless of Israel’s nuclear capabilities and posture, Israel is careful to maintain a high level of conventional capabilities. By doing so, Israel is ensuring that its bomb-in-the-basement stays in the basement.\footnote{Barletta, Ellington, \textit{Israel’s Nuclear Posture Review}; Evron, \textit{Israel’s Nuclear Dilemma}, pp.11-13; Feldman, \textit{Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East}, pp.42-44}

Israel’s nuclear development and the evolution of Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity, suggest that Israel is unlikely to shift to an open nuclear posture in the near future. Nevertheless, some experts argue that Israel would benefit from a transition to an open nuclear posture. I will discuss the pros and cons of nuclear ambiguity versus nuclear disclosure in the next chapter.
Chapter II

Nuclear Ambiguity versus Nuclear Disclosure
Chapter II: Nuclear Ambiguity versus Nuclear Disclosure

“The rationale in disclosing its nuclear weapons would not lie in stating the obvious, but in an informed acceptance and decision that Israel would benefit from such a disclosure.”

Israel’s nuclear weapons program and policies have been debated since their inception. During the nuclear program’s development, most experts debated Israel’s conduct and the value of such a project. Now that Israel is generally accepted as a de facto nuclear weapons state, most experts focus on the merit of Israel’s strict policy of nuclear ambiguity. This debate has been ongoing for decades.

Some experts believe that the debate surrounding Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity is no longer relevant. This is due to the fact that they believe Israel is already a recognized member of the nuclear club, if not an official member, leaving little to disclose. Other experts believe that the debate regarding Israel’s nuclear policy of ambiguity remains relevant, particularly in light of the current international environment. Within this debate, there are two sides: experts who believe that Israel should maintain its current status as an opaque nuclear power and experts who believe that Israel should shift towards nuclear disclosure.

The discussion concerning Israel’s nuclear policies can be narrowed down to a number of significant categories that inform Israel’s decision-making process. In this chapter, I will focus on the four critical elements, which influence Israel’s rationale on this issue. These categories are: 1) deterrence, 2) regional proliferation, 3) the Israeli-Arab peace process, and, 4) US – Israel relations. For each category, I will discuss the

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main arguments for maintaining nuclear ambiguity or shifting to nuclear disclosure and I will discuss the main considerations Israel will have to face when making its decision.

It should be noted that these categories relate to Israel’s nuclear program as both a strategic imperative for ensuring national security, as well as a political matter which can influence Israel’s relations with its neighbors and allies. Both of these elements are crucial factors in Israel’s nuclear policies and can have a significant impact on Israel’s decision making process.

Deterrence

Deterrence strategies utilize threats of preemption and retaliation in order to dissuade an enemy from attempting to achieve its objectives. These strategies are rooted in the assumption that if an enemy knows its attacks will result in high costs to its interests, the enemy will seek to avoid such punishment by refraining from the attack. Deterrence is a form of coercion, similar to strategies of compellence that relies on implicit and explicit threats. A number of factors can influence a country’s deterrence, including the deterring country’s ability to clearly communicate threats, its willingness to use force, and its ability to inflict damages. Additionally, a country’s deterrence is affected by its enemy’s reaction to the threats and willingness to absorb such damages.75

Based on these factors, Israel’s deterrence depends on the extent to which Israel’s enemies know about its capabilities, including its ability to penetrate the enemy state and deliver firepower, as well as Israel’s willingness to use its capabilities. Furthermore, in order for Israel’s deterrence to succeed, its enemies should have a clear understanding

75 Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, pp.24-35
that Israel’s weapons are aimed at high-value targets and that Israel is secure from retaliatory attacks.\textsuperscript{76}

\textit{Deterrence through Nuclear Ambiguity}

Israel’s well-known qualitative military edge (QME) allows Israel to inflict immense conventional damage on its enemies in the face of a threat, providing Israel with strong deterrence. Nevertheless, one of the main arguments in favor of maintaining Israel’s current policy of nuclear ambiguity is that this policy provides Israel with its primary deterrence, without constraining Israel into the limitations and risks involved in openly acknowledging its nuclear program. This argument rests on the assumption that because Israel is considered a \textit{de facto} nuclear weapon state, Israel’s enemies include its nuclear arsenal in their analysis. Additionally, Israel’s undeclared nuclear capabilities might lead its enemies to over-estimate Israel’s nuclear power, enhancing its deterrence even further.\textsuperscript{77}

Some experts point to the lack of a full-scale war between Israel and the Arab states since 1973 as an example of Israel’s successful nuclear ambiguity policies. These experts assert that once Israel’s nuclear program was revealed in the 1960’s, no total Arab assaults on the Jewish state were initiated, in contrast to the assaults that took place prior to Israel’s nuclear weapons program. The experts who argue this point, note that the 1967 and 1973 attacks on Israel were conducted by ad hoc Arab coalitions with aims limited to territorial and political objectives, rather complete annihilation of the Jewish

\textsuperscript{76} Beres, \textit{Israel’s Bomb in the Basement: A Revisiting of “Deliberate Ambiguity” vs. “Disclosure,”} pp.113-114

This suggests that Israel’s nuclear policies caused the Arab governments to refocus their military goals and move towards moderation.78

In addition to Israel’s ability to deter the Arab states from conducting full-scale wars, some experts also believe that Israel’s ability to deter terrorism would be compromised. This is due to the fact that nuclear weapons are typically considered to have little effect on sub-state bodies, such as terrorist organizations, which are often difficult targets for retaliation. Some argue that an overt nuclear posture could constrain Israel’s ability to react to terrorism with heavy conventional force due to the risk of escalation. Moreover, Arab states might be driven towards increased sponsorship of terrorist activities, as a result of their constrained ability to use conventional warfare, from fear of escalation, resulting in more terrorism against Israel.79

For these reasons, many experts note that Israel’s nuclear program is essentially a Samson Option in the event of an existential threat. As such, experts who support maintaining Israel’s current policy of nuclear ambiguity argue that it is unnecessary for Israel to disclose its nuclear weapons capability, unless Israel requires the use of its last resort. If such a scenario were to occur, Israel would have little incentive to refrain from using any defense strategy available. Thus, even if some Arab states developed nuclear weapons capabilities and launched a total assault on Israel’s survival, the balance of deterrence would remain skewed in Israel’s favor.80

To be sure, possible complications exist with using nuclear weapons as a Samson Option. Namely, last resorts are often difficult to define and can result in escalating

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78 Maoz, The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy, pp.47-48
79 Evron, Israel’s Nuclear Dilemma, pp.244-246; Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, pp.130-131
enemy probes, as was the case with Israel’s conventional ‘red lines.’ Furthermore, the decision-making process to engage the Samson Option is likely to be carried out under conditions of extreme uncertainty and distress, risking the possibility of an irrational or unjustified decision to attack. Nevertheless, when a country faces enemies willing to inflict unacceptable damage, the defender will demonstrate little hesitation and great will. In essence, “a state whose survival is threatened may feel that it has nothing to lose and may therefore be willing to absorb enormous punishment [for its use of force].”

Based on the arguments that an Israeli transition to an open nuclear deterrent would limit Israel’s ability to use conventional force, could increase terrorism and possibly lead to escalation, experts in favor of maintaining Israel’s nuclear opacity assert that gains from a transition to an open nuclear policy would be extremely marginal while the price would be very high. Israel’s current posture has already forced Arab states to reevaluate their stance towards Israel and prevented complete assaults against its existence. Furthermore, an open nuclear posture is unlikely to prevent wars of attrition or prolonged fighting. As a result of these views, experts in favor of maintaining Israel’s current nuclear opacity policy argue that Israel’s deterrence remains strong and viable and that Israel would not likely increase its deterrence by disclosing its nuclear weapons program.

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81 Feldman, *Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s*, p.31
83 This price includes regional instability, a failed peace-process, and disintegration of Israel’s close relationship with the US.
Deterrence through Nuclear Disclosure

In contrast to experts in favor of maintaining Israel’s nuclear opacity, some experts argue that Israel’s current policies no longer provide sufficient deterrence and Israel should transition to a declared nuclear deterrent. This is based on the argument that Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity failed to limit Arab goals and failed to deter Arab attacks against the Jewish state. Experts substantiate their claims by noting that Israel has faced a number of crises since the exposure of its nuclear program, including wars in 1973 and 1991, which occurred after Israel’s nuclear weapons were developed. Furthermore, some evidence suggests that during the 1973 and 1991 wars, Israel armed its nuclear weapons and issued secret threats regarding their usage, however the threats failed to prevent attacks. Thus, some experts believe that Israel’s policies of nuclear ambiguity failed have not provided Israel with sufficient deterrence.85

Some note that the regional and international conditions under which Israel developed its opaque policies no longer exist and as such, Israel’s posture of ambiguity is outdated. Others assert that if another country in the Middle East successfully developed nuclear weapons, Israel would no longer be a nuclear monopoly, causing its nuclear deterrence to become either ineffective or irrelevant. Both these arguments are based on the claim that Israel’s existing deterrence would be undermined if it maintained its policy of nuclear ambiguity.86

Some experts express concern that Israel’s nuclear opacity pose a threat to the Israeli population, rather than provide Israel with deterrence. This is based on the assumption that Arab leaders would target Israel’s nuclear weapons at the onset of a confrontation if

85 Maoz, The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy, pp.47-59
86 Karsh, Navias, Israeli Nuclear Weapons and Middle East Peace, pp.76-85; Maoz, The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy, p.45
they believed Israel would use its capabilities against them. Such a scenario would increase the conflict’s escalatory potential and endanger the Israeli public. Another scenario in which Israel’s nuclear opacity could pose a threat to the Israeli public might develop as a result of Arab uncertainty regarding Israel’s willingness to use its nuclear capabilities, causing Israel’s deterrence to fall to an unacceptably low level.87

In order to maintain a strong deterrent, some experts argue that Israel should switch to a policy of nuclear disclosure. Removing Israel’s bomb from the basement would heighten enemy perceptions regarding Israel’s nuclear capabilities and provide Israel with additional influence on enemy calculations. This would enable Arab leaders to extrapolate directly from Israel’s doctrine the magnitude of the expected punishment for threatening the Jewish state. Since the Arab states are unlikely to ignore the threat of a disproportionate Israeli nuclear force directed at their high value targets, Israel’s deterrence would be boosted. Further, a signal that its nuclear capabilities are fully developed and functional, would also lend greater credibility to Israel’s deterrence.88

A transition to nuclear disclosure would allow Israel to augment its specific deterrence, assisting Israel in its efforts against terrorism, border raids, and limited military incursions. This is based on the premise that an openly declared nuclear weapons program would increase Israel’s general deterrence and minimize Israel’s risk of

88 Ibid.
conventional war. As a result, Israel could shift more resources towards its counter-terrorism and border protection, increasing Israel’s overall national security.\(^8^9\)

Although an openly declared nuclear weapons program would not provide Israel with an infallible shield against existential threats, the deterrence threshold for proven nuclear weapon states is higher than non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS). However, simply unveiling Israel’s nuclear weapons program would be insufficient to boost Israel’s deterrence to the desired level. Israel’s enemies must fully understand that Israel’s nuclear weapons are sufficiently invulnerable to attacks and that Israel is willing to do whatever is necessary to prevent an existential threat. As such, Israel would also be required to clarify its boundaries of tolerance.\(^9^0\)

In essence, “[b]y providing effective deterrence, nuclear weapons have the capacity to reduce the likelihood of war, both conventional and nuclear. Nuclear attacks will be deterred by the prospect of nuclear retaliation; conventional attacks will be deterred by the fear that they may escalate into a nuclear exchange.”\(^9^1\) Terrorism and border raids would likely be decreased as a result of Israel’s improved conventional capabilities.\(^9^2\)

- Based on the arguments presented above, it is difficult to determine whether Israel would benefit from a shift in nuclear posture. The arguments regarding Israel’s nuclear deterrence are inconclusive regarding both conventional and unconventional enemies. To be sure, Israel could benefit from enhanced

\(^8^9\) Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, pp.104-105, 131-132; Feldman, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East, pp.16-19

\(^9^0\) Beres, Reconsidering Israel’s Nuclear Ambiguity; Beres, Israel’s Bomb in the Basement: A Revisiting of “Deliberate Ambiguity” vs. “Disclosure,” pp.120-121; Beres, Maoz, Correspondence: Israel and the Bomb, pp.176-177; Shalom, Israel’s Nuclear Option, pp.174-178

\(^9^1\) Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, p.238

\(^9^2\) Ibid., pp.235-240
deterrence, which would enable Israel to further develop its conventional capabilities and influence its enemies’ decisions. However, as a result of Israel’s de facto nuclear status, it is safe to assume that Israel’s enemies already factor its capabilities into their calculations. Furthermore, although regional and international conditions are changing, Israel currently maintains a nuclear monopoly in the region and as a result, its deterrence remains strong. As such, based on deterrence considerations alone, Israel would not necessarily benefit from a shift in nuclear posture at the current juncture.

Regional Proliferation: A Middle East Arms Race

Throughout the development of Israel’s nuclear program, Arab nations also expressed interests in developing nuclear capabilities. Often this was meant as a response to Israel’s nuclear program. For example, in 1974, Egyptian President Muhammad Anwar El Sadat promised that “if Israel intends to introduce nuclear weapons into this area, we too will find a way of acquiring such weapons.”\(^{93}\) In 1977 Syrian President Hafez Assad made a similar comment, stating that “If Israel possesses this weapon, than we will possess it too.”\(^{94}\) Since then, the list of Arab countries that have expressed an interest in, or begun developing nuclear programs includes: Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.\(^{95}\)

Some experts attribute the Arabs’ ongoing interest in developing nuclear programs to Israel’s nuclear program; however, most experts attribute this interest to Iran’s aggressive

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\(^{93}\) Ibid., p.96
\(^{94}\) Ibid., p.70
\(^{95}\) Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, pp.69-71; IISS, Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran, pp.17-60, 73-93
quest for a nuclear weapon. Nevertheless, there is a heightened focus on nuclear capabilities in the Middle East, and some experts have expressed concern that any proliferation could develop into a full-blown Middle Eastern nuclear arms race. To be sure, Israel’s nuclear policies have an impact on the region. Thus, any deliberations regarding Israel’s nuclear policies must examine the effects a change of policy would have on Israel’s neighbors and the potential for a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.96

Regional Proliferation and Israel’s Nuclear Ambiguity

One of the most prominent arguments in favor of maintaining Israel’s nuclear opacity stems from concerns that a disclosed Israeli nuclear bomb would spur nuclearization throughout the Arab world. Moreover, a disclosed Israeli nuclear weapons program could increase Arab unity against Israel and exacerbate linkages to Arab military buildups. In essence, the introduction of nuclear weapons into a region with a 60-year tradition of conflict might increase the risk that the weapons would be used. For this reason, some experts argue that Israel should maintain its nuclear ambiguity posture.97

Some experts argue that Arab dictatorships are vulnerable to governmental instabilities, posing a particular risk of conflict escalation in the event of a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race. These instabilities could negate any balance of terror that would be established, as Arab decision-makers are often viewed as irrational and unpredictable actors. In fact, some experts have speculated that the introduction of nuclear weapons into the region might lead to the world’s first full-scale nuclear war.98

96 Ibid.
Some experts believe that the Arab nations make strategic decisions with the knowledge of Israel’s existing nuclear arsenal. Based on this argument, Israel’s current posture of nuclear ambiguity is preventing a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. “It is Israel’s perceived possession of a substantial nuclear arsenal that, more than anything else, has underscored the Arabs’ inability to destroy the Jewish states… [an open discussion of Israel’s nuclear program] will only accelerate the ongoing non-conventional buildup in the Middle East by putting additional pressures on the regional leaderships to intensify their efforts.”\textsuperscript{99} \textsuperscript{100}

Concerns that an Israeli transition to a declared nuclear status might increase Arabs’ pursuit of nuclear weapons, combined with the belief that a nuclearized Middle East would be more likely to engage in nuclear war, suggest that it would be dangerous for Israel to shift its current nuclear posture. As such, some argue that Israel would reduce the risk of a regional nuclear arms race by maintaining its posture of nuclear ambiguity.

\textit{Regional Proliferation and an Israeli Nuclear Disclosure}

The opinion that an open Israeli nuclear posture would be dangerous for Middle Eastern stability is not uniform throughout the expert community. Experts disagree over Israel’s influence on the potential for nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. In contrast to the views described above, some experts believe that the build-up of nuclear arsenals in the Middle East is not the result of Israel’s nuclear program or the Arab-Israeli conflict. Rather, Arab dynamics have caused the regional players to arm themselves. As such, Arab nations would be unlikely to change their nuclear ambitions, if Israel were to

\textsuperscript{99} Karsh, Navias, \textit{Israeli Nuclear Weapons and Middle East Peace}, p.76
openly declare a nuclear weapons capability, or even agree to disarm. In essence, a
transition in Israel’s nuclear stance would not necessarily spur a Middle Eastern nuclear
arms race.101

Furthermore, some experts assert that a nuclearized Middle East would not
necessarily become the location of the world’s first nuclear war. This is based on the
viewpoint that there is a vast gap between the language used by Middle Eastern leaders,
which often incorporates extreme rhetoric, and their actual behavior. As such, there is no
clear indication that Arab leaders are irrational or would use nuclear weapons on a whim,
and it possible that Arab leaders would remain sensitive to the costs of using nuclear
weapons.102

If Israel were to transition to a declared nuclear posture, it would have little concern
for a nuclearized Arab coalition as a response. Arab relationships have already proven
challenging and Arab nations will likely continue having difficulties sharing authority on
issues such as strategic policies or command and control. It is more likely that “the
introduction of [Israeli] nuclear weapons would lead the Arab states not to unite against
Israel, but to develop even greater rivalries among themselves.”103 These patterns have
already begun developing within the Middle East, as a result of Iran’s aggressive nuclear
weapons program. For example, in June 2009, two Israeli naval ships crossed the Suez
Canal for the first time. Analysts noted that the unique coordination between Israel and
Egypt was intended as a signal for Iran and its nuclear quest.104

101 Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, p.83; Karsh, Navias, Israeli Nuclear
Weapons and Middle East Peace, pp.76-85; Maoz, The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy, p.45
102 Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, pp.145-152; Feldman, Nuclear Weapons
and Arms Control in the Middle East, pp.22-25
103 Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, p.154
104 AFP Staff, Israeli warships make rare Suez crossing; Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy
for the 1980s, pp.153-155
Perhaps an additional benefit of an Israeli shift to an open nuclear posture is that it would encourage greater debate on the implications of nuclear weapons in the region. Shai Feldman describes this process as “socialization to the facts of nuclear life,” in which newspapers, universities, politicians, and the general public become acutely aware of the realities of a nuclearized Middle East. As more people become aware of the constraints imposed by nuclear weapons, socialization could reduce the level of misunderstandings and minimize the pressure on Arab governments to pursue aggressive policies against Israel. Additionally, socialization to the facts of nuclear life could reduce the possibility of instability caused by Arab leadership changes. This is based on the assumption that when new Arab leadership emerges, they will have been exposed to the constraints posed by nuclear weapons as part of their military training and will be less likely to implement reckless policies.

Concerns of a Middle East nuclear arms race tie in with the question of Israel’s deterrence capabilities. However, if Israel transitioned to an open nuclear weapons stance, its deterrence would remain intact as long as Israel maintains strong second-strike capabilities. This stems from Israel’s overwhelming determination in the face of an existential threat as previously discussed.

Essentially, the main concern regarding a nuclear arms race in the Middle East is not the number of states possessing nuclear weapons, but the number of states willing to use their nuclear arsenals. This number will grow as the number of nuclear states in the Middle East grows. However, based on the argument that Israel’s nuclear program has

105 Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, p.22
106 Ibid., pp.22-24
not influenced its neighbors nuclear aims, some experts believe that the likelihood of a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race or nuclear war remains low, even if Israel were to transition to an open nuclear posture.¹⁰⁸

➢ To be sure, a nuclear arms race in the Middle East would severely threaten regional stability. While some experts believe that Israel’s nuclear policies have been instrumental in fueling a Middle Eastern unconventional arms race, in the current international climate, most Arab nations recognize that Israel’s nuclear weapons program does not pose a threat to them, unless Israel is provoked. The spiked interest in nuclear weapons in the Middle East is a direct result of Arab rivalries and Iran’s aggressive quest for a nuclear weapon, not Israel’s bomb in the basement. Therefore, if Israel transitioned to an openly declared nuclear weapons program, it would not face a nuclearized Arab coalition, nor would this spur a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race, particularly, if Israel were to transition as a result of regional concerns shared by its Arab neighbors.

The Arab-Israeli Peace Process

The Arab-Israeli peace process has been ongoing for over sixty years. It is a complex situation involving multiple actors and a host of issues, including borders, refugees, and security concerns. Some experts believe that Israel’s nuclear policies have had little effect on the peace process: “there is no evidence thus far linking Israeli-Arab diplomacy and Israel’s nuclear policy… the roots of the peace process… are found in Israeli policy towards [the West Bank and Gaza Strip], rather than in the effect of Israel’s nuclear

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
program on the Arab states.”

Other experts believe that Israel’s nuclear policies have had a direct effect on the peace process, either by hindering it or by encouraging the Arabs to engage in the peace process from the onset. Based on these viewpoints, it is important to consider how a shift in Israel’s nuclear posture might affect the Arab-Israeli peace process and the ongoing peace negotiations.

Obtaining Peace while Maintaining Nuclear Ambiguity

Some experts believe that Israel’s nuclear program has not impeded the Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. On the contrary, Israel’s nuclear program encouraged the Arabs to move towards pragmatic acceptance of Israel’s existence and bring the Arabs to the negotiating table: “it was only after the suspicion that Israel had managed to acquire nuclear weapons had become an established reality in the minds of her Arab neighbors that a slow process of acquiescence in the fact of Israel began to evolve.”

Based on this argument, some experts believe that its existing nuclear policies have been essential to Israel’s relationships with its Arab neighbors.

Israel’s implicit nuclear factor has allowed its Arab neighbors to justify limited military action, while engaging in peace negotiations with Israel. To exemplify this, in an interview in 1984, Peres discussed the influence Israel’s opaque nuclear monopoly has had on the Middle East peace process. He stated that Israel’s nuclear option contributed to Israel’s peace with Egypt, and expressed concern that Israel was not utilizing its

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109 Maoz, The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy, p.67
110 Karsh, Navias, Israeli Nuclear Weapons and Middle East Peace, pp.85-88; Maoz, The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy, pp.44, 64-69
111 Karsh, Navias, Israeli Nuclear Weapons and Middle East Peace, p.86
dominant position to obtain more peace agreements: “today we have what we have, and they have not what they have not, and the truth is, that there is not a technological answer.”  

Avner Cohen came to a similar conclusion: “[Opacity] brought many Arabs to the realization that the conflict could not be settled by military means, but only through negotiation. The peace treaty with Egypt in 1979, the Oslo agreements with the Palestinians in 1993, and the peace treaty with Jordan in 1994 were negotiated in the shadow of opaque nuclear weapons.”

Based on the arguments discussed above, Israel’s nuclear program encouraged its neighbors to accept its existence and Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity enabled the Arabs to enter into the peace process. These arguments coincide with concerns mentioned above that an Israeli nuclear disclosure would spur a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and harm Israel’s relationships with the Arabs. As such, some experts believe that Israel should maintain its current posture of nuclear ambiguity, in order to maintain its existing relationships and further the ongoing peace process with its neighbors.

**Attaining Peace with a Nuclear Disclosure**

In contrast with the opinions mentioned above, some experts argue that Israel’s nuclear policies only marginally affected the Arabs’ decision to engage in the peace process with Israel. Rather, the Arab states viewed the peace process as within their own self interest. To support this argument, experts note that there were a number of Arab peace initiatives in the early 1950’s and into the 1960’s, before Israel’s nuclear program

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114 Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, p.342
became public knowledge. Further, the peace initiatives continued after the program’s existence was disclosed. Based on this, some experts assert that Israel’s conventional capabilities, combined with its willingness to trade land for peace, influenced the Arab states to enter into peace negotiations, irrespective of Israel’s nuclear capabilities.\(^\text{115}\)

Many experts believe that a shift of Israel’s nuclear posture would not necessarily hinder long-term progress of the peace process. Rather, a declared nuclear posture would enable Israel to make more concessions as its deterrence increased, allowing Israel to enter into additional peace agreements. However, the adoption of an overt nuclear posture must be introduced in tandem with political and military efforts to meet some Arab territorial demands. This would require Israel to develop a new security policy, which could be modified according to Israel’s new relationships.\(^\text{116}\)

Some experts also believe that an Israeli nuclear disclosure would improve the level of effective communication between Israel and its neighbors. This is based on the premise that a nuclear disclosure could facilitate strategic dialogues between conflicting parties, which could be used to reduce the danger of misunderstandings, uncontrolled escalations, and regional destabilization. However, if the lines of communication enhanced for strategic dialogues, they might also be used for other dialogues, including peace dialogues. As such, “[i]creasing clarity of communication between the parties is an additional bonus of the overall decreased level of secrecy in the realm of nuclear weapons.”\(^\text{117, 118}\)

\(^{115}\) Maoz, *The Mixed Blessing of Israel’s Nuclear Policy*, pp.44, 64-69; Dowty, *Going Public with the Bomb*, pp.18-19


\(^{117}\) Ibid., p.35

\(^{118}\) Ibid., pp.19-24
Based on these viewpoints, some argue that the Arab-Israeli peace process would not suffer long-term effects if Israel disclosed its nuclear capabilities. In fact, a shift in Israel’s stance might enable Israel to make additional concessions and improve the lines of communication with Israel’s neighbors, resulting in additional peace agreements. As such, some experts believe that Israel and the peace process would benefit from an Israeli nuclear disclosure.

➢ There is no definitive answer on how Israel’s nuclear policies have affected its relationships with its Arab neighbors. Similarly, it is difficult to determine how an Israeli shift in nuclear posture would affect the Arab-Israeli peace process. It is doubtful that the Arabs would come to the negotiating table with Israel in the short-term after a shift in Israel’s nuclear posture. However, the Arabs might be willing to resume the peace process in the long-term, despite an Israeli transition. This would require Israel to clearly communicate that its weapons are for defensive purposes, rather than offensive, and as such they would only be used if Israel faced severe threats. Furthermore, Israel’s transition should be combined with a willingness to make concessions.

In my opinion, the Arabs would decide to resume peace negotiations based on self-interests, rather than as a reaction to Israel’s nuclear posture. Nevertheless, it is important to note that “the resolution of the Arab-Israeli dispute would not necessarily relieve all perceptions of existential threat in the region… Interest in nuclear weapons might still seem relevant.”119

119 Ibid., p.6
US - Israel Relations

Chapter one discussed the impact the US-Israel relationship had on the evolution of Israel’s nuclear posture. Although the US was unsuccessful in halting Israel’s nuclear program, US influence led Israel to develop its program in a manner that did not cause conflict or openly defy the US’s non-proliferation agenda, leading to Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity. To be sure, Israel remains dependent on US foreign aid and the US continues to enjoy considerable influence on Israel’s foreign policy. If Israel admitted possession of nuclear weapons, the US-Israel relationship would undoubtedly be complicated, particularly in light of the US’s ongoing nuclear non-proliferation agenda. As such, any discussion regarding Israel’s policies and nuclear program must address their effects on US-Israel relations.

US – Israel Relations and Israel’s Nuclear Ambiguity

Israel’s policy of ambiguity enabled Israel to develop a nuclear arsenal while maintaining close relations with the US and avoiding pressure to adhere to international non-proliferation regimes. Many believe this holds true today. For example, in October 2009, it was reported that US President Barak Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reaffirmed the unwritten nuclear understandings established by President Nixon and Prime Minister Meir in 1969. As such, some experts have expressed concern that the US would view an Israeli transition to an openly declared nuclear stance as detrimental to American interests and goals.\(^{120}\)

Israel’s close relationship with the US is often reinforced with clear public statements. Nevertheless, Israel is not protected by any formal alliances. As such, the primary concern is that the US might react to an Israeli disclosure by cutting off its foreign aid or with a similar form of punishment. This is based on US law, which clearly stipulates that no aid can be given to a nation that detonates a nuclear device if that nation is officially classified as a NNWS.\(^{121}\) If the US were to end its financial assistance to Israel, Israel would face long-term challenges in improving and relying on its defense capabilities alone. Therefore, a negative US reaction to an Israeli shift in policy could be a major detriment to Israeli security.\(^{122}\)

It is possible and perhaps even probable that the US would have a negative reaction to a shift in Israeli nuclear posture. This is based on the US’s expressed concern for the risk of a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race and the possible collapse of the NPT, both of which affect US interests. As such, the negative impact of a declared Israeli nuclear weapons program on US-Israel relations could be considerable enough to persuade Israel to maintain its nuclear ambiguity policy. Furthermore, some experts believe that Israel is currently in a position to gain significant concessions from the US by not declaring its nuclear weapons capability, thereby strengthening Israel’s bargaining position on other issues such as conventional arms deals.\(^{123}\)

Based on these considerations, some experts agree that Israel’s nuclear opacity has proven exceedingly effective in maintaining a positive relationship with the US. Thus, if

\(^{121}\) This law raises certain questions concerning the possibility of an Israeli nuclear disclosure that does not include the detonation of a nuclear device. Nevertheless, the point of the law is clear – the US will not support any NNWS that take actions towards developing or acquiring nuclear weapons.


Israel transitioned to an openly declared nuclear posture, it would hurt its close relationship with the US, risk losing foreign aid and harm its QME by extension.\textsuperscript{124}

\textit{US – Israel Relations and an Israeli Transition to Nuclear Disclosure}

Although an Israeli shift in nuclear policy might be received with a strong negative reaction from the US, experts in favor of an Israeli disclosure argue that historically, when forced, the US has reconciled itself to a new state’s nuclear capabilities. India is a good example of this scenario. India, having never become a member of the NPT, completed its nuclear weapons program in 1998, in spite of international objections. Ten years later and after 25 years of isolation, in 2008, the US and India entered into a nuclear cooperation agreement, which lifted the US moratorium on nuclear trade and allowed the US to provide assistance to India’s civilian nuclear program. Critics of the US-India nuclear cooperation agreement argued that the deal undermined US non-proliferation efforts. Proponents of the cooperation agreement asserted that it was in the US’s best interests to develop closer ties with India. Furthermore, US policy-makers stated that although India is not a signatory of the NPT, it is committed to responsible nuclear behavior does not pose a proliferation risk.\textsuperscript{125}

Experts in favor of an Israeli shift in nuclear policies believe that the US might come to similar conclusions regarding Israel. Maria N. Zaitseva notes that the US’s original acceptance of Israel’s nuclear weapons program was influenced, in part, by the US’s view of what could be detrimental to US national security interests. By extension, if Israel’s nuclear program does not defiantly threaten the US’s interests or its non-

\textsuperscript{124} Cohen, \textit{Israel and the Bomb}, pp.3-5
\textsuperscript{125} Pan, Bayoria, \textit{The U.S.-India Nuclear Deal}; Ware, \textit{Nuclear Stockpiles}; Zaitseva, \textit{When an Ally Goes Nuclear: The Nature of the American Response to the Israeli Nuclear Program}, pp.37-38, 44-46
proliferation agenda, there is no reason to assume that a shift in Israeli posture would result in a change in US-Israel relations.126

The US’s response to such a transition could be moderated by the context and manner in which the nuclear disclosure was made, similar to the US-India case. If Israel declared its nuclear capabilities in a palpable manner for the US, such a disclosure would hardly surprise many Washingtonians. As such, the US might not react too severely.127

Two of the most significant factors that would influence the US’s response to an Israeli shift in posture, are the US’s long-standing commitment to Israel’s security and the domestic voices that call for maintaining that commitment. The US might determine that Israel is a ‘special case,’ thereby allowing the US to accept Israel’s nuclear program without sanctions or punishment. However, Israel and the pro-Israel community within the US would have to be extremely persuasive to secure support from the US. Additionally, the US might be willing to accept Israel’s nuclear disclosure, if it were presented in the context of a comprehensive commitment that would not require the US to completely forgo its non-proliferation agenda.128

Some experts note that the US’s reaction to an Israeli transition to an overt nuclear posture might be moderated if the shift in posture were to take place after at least one other Arab or Muslim state acquired nuclear weapons. This would give Israel a stronger rationale for its need for nuclear weapons and would inhibit the US from severely

126 Ben, Obama Won’t Shut Down Dimona; Beres, Reconsidering Israel’s Nuclear Ambiguity; Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, pp.203-206, 212-213; Jerusalem Post Staff, Israel: No Change in U.S. Nuclear Policy; Ravid, Making Israel Sign the Nuclear Treaty Won’t be Miracle Cure for World Ills; Zaitseva, When an Ally Goes Nuclear: The Nature of the American Response to the Israeli Nuclear Program, pp.37-38, 44-46
127 Ibid.
condemning Israel’s actions. Furthermore, if Israel’s existence was threatened by a full-scale Arab attack, the US’s reaction would be more sympathetic to Israel’s disclosure.  

Israeli policy-makers might not want to wait until such extreme circumstances before adopting an overt nuclear posture. In that case, once Israel disclosed its nuclear weapons as an existing fact, the US would be required to assess the new situation and adapt accordingly. The US might determine that if it stopped providing Israel with foreign aid for its QME, Israel would be required to rely solely on its own defense capabilities and eventually be forced to use its nuclear capabilities, if its conventional capabilities failed. Based on this, the US might view cutting off Israel’s foreign aid as counter-productive to its goal of preventing nuclear war.

Based on these arguments, some experts believe that an Israeli shift in nuclear posture would not cause the US-Israel relationship to suffer long-term damage. This is founded on the US’s history of dealing with nuclear developments in the international community, combined with the long-standing relationship between Israel and the US. Essentially, proponents of an openly declared Israeli nuclear program assert that the benefits to such a disclosure outweigh the costs to the US-Israel relationship, if Israel’s nuclear program does not directly harm US interests.

➢ To be sure, the US-Israel relationship remains a high priority for Israel. Israel’s nuclear opacity has been effective in maintaining a positive relationship with the US and if Israel were to maintain its current nuclear status, undoubtedly the strong relationship would continue. However, I believe that in the long-term, the US-

129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
Israel relationship would be unharmed if Israel openly declared its nuclear program. The transition must be conducted in a palpable manner for the US and with minimal harm to US interests. Israel should not expect a response of overwhelming approval from the US. However, barring an initial negative or neutral reaction, the US would eventually come to terms with Israel’s new nuclear status, and would maintain its commitment to the US-Israel relationship.

**Nuclear Ambiguity versus Nuclear Disclosure**

Based on the four elements discussed in this chapter; deterrence, a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race, the peace process and the US-Israel relationship, it is difficult to determine whether Israel would benefit from a shift to nuclear transparency, or from maintaining its current nuclear ambiguity. Israel’s nuclear deterrence would likely increase with a transition to a declared nuclear weapons capability; however, there are no indications that Israel’s current nuclear deterrence is insufficient. It appears unlikely that a shift in Israel’s nuclear policies would spur a nuclear arms race in the Middle East or that Israel would face a nuclearized Arab coalition that threatens its existence. Although an Israeli nuclear disclosure would hinder the peace process in the short-term, there is little indication that the peace process would be terminated permanently. Similarly, although US-Israel relations would undoubtedly be challenged due to Israel’s initial disclosure, it appears that in the long run the US-Israel relationship would be unharmed. Based on these conclusions, if Israel transitioned to nuclear disclosure, it would be received by the US and its neighbors after an initial period of adjustment. Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine whether Israel should maintain its current ambiguity.
The discussion regarding the future direction of Israel’s nuclear policies has been conducted on an academic level, suggesting that at this point, this issue remains within the realm of speculation. It would appear that the strongest proponents of maintaining Israel’s nuclear ambiguity are Israeli policy-makers, who have maintained Israel’s current nuclear status without engaging in any debate regarding the merits of a transition. As a result, there are fewer proponents publicly calling for maintaining nuclear opacity.

Israel’s deterrence, the risk of a Middle East nuclear arms race, the ongoing peace process and US-Israel relations are significant elements of policy considerations. However, they are not the only elements which can influence Israel’s nuclear policies. It is impossible to determine the best nuclear stance for Israel based on the four elements mentioned in this chapter alone. Additional considerations include current events and international pressures, which I will discuss in the next chapter.
Chapter III

Looking Forward: Nuclear War or Nuclear Disarmament?
Chapter III: Nuclear War or Nuclear Disarmament?

“Ambiguity regarding the nuclear issue is part of Israel’s national security concept. There is no reason for us to hurry in removing this ambiguity. This is particularly the case as neighboring countries, like Iran and Iraq, are calling for Israel’s destruction.”\textsuperscript{131}

- Israel’s Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, 1995

There are a number of additional elements to consider when debating the costs and benefits of Israel’s nuclear ambiguity policies, in addition to those discussed in chapter two. For example, the international community’s focus on nuclear disarmament, in light of President Obama’s ongoing non-proliferation agenda and the upcoming NPT review conference. Another factor to consider is Iran’s aggressive nuclear program, which is currently Israel’s biggest security concern. Finally, Israeli public opinion is likely to have a significant influence on Israel’s nuclear policy.\textsuperscript{132} I will discuss these additional considerations in this chapter and attempt to evaluate their effects on a potential shift from Israel’s nuclear ambiguity to nuclear disclosure.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

Since the discovery of Israel’s nuclear program, the international community has engaged in efforts to reveal Israel’s nuclear capabilities and disarm them. Most

\textsuperscript{131} Feldman, \textit{Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East}, p.245

\textsuperscript{132} There are a number of additional considerations which could affect Israel’s nuclear policies, for example increased progress on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and Israel’s conventional deterrence advancements, which would be worth examining in a larger research study.
international non-proliferation forums discuss Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity and many demand that Israel disarm its nuclear weapons and accede to the NPT.\textsuperscript{133}

The NPT is an international treaty that was established in 1968 and has since accumulated 189 countries. It was designed to eliminate proliferation of WMDs by outlawing them and striking an international grand bargain of disarmament. To do so, the NPT distinguishes between the nuclear weapons states and NNWS and upholds different requirements for each group. The original five nuclear weapons states (the US, Soviet Union, France, the UK and China) agreed to make progress towards nuclear disarmament. In return, the NNWS agreed not to acquire nuclear weapons in exchange for access to the benefits of civilian nuclear energy. The NPT also established safeguarding mechanisms for nuclear materials and facilities through IAEA inspections. As part of the agreement, NPT members convene every five years to review the treaty’s progress and are currently preparing for the 2010 NPT Review Conference. From the onset, Israel was a unique case regarding the NPT: Having already become an undeclared nuclear power prior to the treaty, Israel was in a gray area as neither a nuclear weapons state nor a NNWS.\textsuperscript{134}

During the 1960’s, while the US was heavily involved in negotiations with Israel regarding its nuclear weapons program, it was also involved in international negotiations regarding the NPT. Once the US concluded that it had failed to block Israel from developing a nuclear option, it determined that the best course of action was to persuade

\textsuperscript{133} Barnaby, Capping Israel’s Nuclear Volcano, pp.108-111; Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, pp.67-69; Maoz, The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy, p.68
Israel to sign the NPT. This was initially attempted by linking US Phantom (F-4) sales and other political concessions to Israel’s signature to the NPT; however, these linkages were eventually dropped.  

Israel responded to US pressure to join the NPT by explaining that it would be a mistake to alleviate the Arab countries’ concerns about Israel’s program by signing the NPT. Joining the treaty would require Israel to openly declare its nuclear capabilities and let IAEA inspectors visit its nuclear sites. However, as key feature of Israel’s security hinges on psychological assumptions, if Israel were to remove the doubts concerning its nuclear program, Israel’s deterrence would be harmed. This would force Israel to rely solely on its conventional forces and perhaps a US security umbrella. Thus, as long as Arab nations remained hostile towards Israel, Israel could not sign the NPT. Nevertheless, Israel reaffirmed its commitment to international non-proliferation principles.  

Israel’s ability to participate in non-proliferation and disarmament efforts has been guided by its ambiguity policies. Although these goals are aligned with Israel’s strategic interest in keeping additional nuclear weapons out of the Middle East, Israel’s policies have prevented it from participating in these efforts. However, Israel has always cited safeguard deficiencies and NPT violations as an explanation for inability to enter into the treaty, rather than discussing Israel’s specific national security requirements. Essentially, Israel views IAEA safeguards as insufficient and will not rely on the NPT system for guaranteeing its security. This is due to Article X of the treaty, which allows a party to

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135 Ibid.  
136 Barnaby, Capping Israel’s Nuclear Volcano, pp.108-111; Beres, Israel’s Bomb in the Basement: A Revisitting of “Deliberate Ambiguity” vs. “Disclosure,” pp.120-121; Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, pp.67-69; Maoz, The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy, p.68; Shalom, Israel’s Nuclear Option, pp.147-152, 166-167
withdraw from the NPT. For example, in 2003, North Korea withdrew from the NPT in order to develop nuclear weapons. In contrast, Iran is an example of a country which is actively developing nuclear weapons, despite being a member of the NPT. Owing to these and similar infractions, Israel is unable to accede to the NPT or commit to a significant reduction of its deterrence capabilities.\textsuperscript{137}

Despite Israel’s stated inability to join the NPT, calls for Israel to enter into the NPT periodically surface on the international agenda. Most recently, in September 2009, the IAEA passed a non-binding resolution for the first time in 18 years, which urged Israel to agree to inspections and sign the NPT. The resolution, which specifically singled out Israel, was rejected by Israel and most Western nations for being unfair and unproductive.\textsuperscript{138}

Some experts argue that Israel’s nuclear posture is the greatest obstacle to the NPT and it is imperative to disarm Israel of its nuclear power. This has raised concerns that Israel might be forced to openly acknowledge its nuclear weapons and to begin a process of disarmament. For example, in May 2009, Assistant US Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller stated that “universal adherence to the NPT itself, including by India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea ... remains a fundamental objective of the United States.”\textsuperscript{139} This statement caused a stir amongst some experts who argued that it


\textsuperscript{138} Reuters Staff, \textit{UN Body Urges Israel to Allow Nuclear Inspection}

\textsuperscript{139} Jerusalem Post Staff, \textit{Israel: No Change in U.S. Nuclear Policy}
indicated a shift in US policy from its previous position of ignoring Israel’s nuclear capabilities, potentially leading to US pressure on Israel to close Dimona.\(^{140}\)

In contrast, other experts asserted that Gottemoeller’s statement did not indicate a shift in US policy towards Israel’s nuclear ambiguity. Nor were there any immediate concerns that President Obama will close Dimona or pressure Israel to disclose its nuclear program. Rather, the statement merely reflected the US’s objective of universal adherence to the NPT. “There is little logical reason that the Obama administration would change its policy towards Israel's nuclear weapons. After all, the Obama administration—and the world—would gain no benefit from simply forcing Israel to come clean and end its nuclear opacity.”\(^{141}\) Based on the US-Israel history regarding nuclear weapons, it is reasonable to expect that Washington will refrain from actively pressing Israel to join the NPT. However, the US might urge Israel to enter into interim non-proliferation commitments as an alternative.\(^{142}\)

In light of Israel’s unique stance of nuclear opacity, any policy that targets Israel as the cornerstone of international disarmament is likely to fail. Some experts believe that forcing Israel’s nuclear program out of the basement, even for the purposes of eventual disarmament, would only harm regional stability in the Middle East. This is particularly true in light of Iran’s nuclear program and additional nuclear efforts in the Middle East.

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\(^{140}\) Ben, Obama Won’t Shut Down Dimona; Cohen, Perkovich, The Obama-Netanyahu Meeting: Nuclear Issues; Feldman, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East, pp.195-195; IISS, Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran, pp.120-124; Jerusalem Post Staff, Israel: No Change in U.S. Nuclear Policy; Karsh, Navias, Israeli Nuclear Weapons and Middle East Peace, pp.75-76; Ravid, Making Israel Sign the Nuclear Treaty Won’t be Miracle Cure for World Ills; Zaitseva, When an Ally Goes Nuclear: The Nature of the American Response to the Israeli Nuclear Program, pp.37-38, 44-46

\(^{141}\) Cohen, Perkovich, The Obama-Netanyahu Meeting: Nuclear Issues

\(^{142}\) Ben, Obama Won’t Shut Down Dimona; Cohen, Perkovich, The Obama-Netanyahu Meeting: Nuclear Issues; Feldman, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East, pp.195-195; IISS, Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran, pp.120-124; Jerusalem Post Staff, Israel: No Change in U.S. Nuclear Policy; Karsh, Navias, Israeli Nuclear Weapons and Middle East Peace, pp.75-76; Ravid, Making Israel Sign the Nuclear Treaty Won’t be Miracle Cure for World Ills; Zaitseva, When an Ally Goes Nuclear: The Nature of the American Response to the Israeli Nuclear Program, pp.37-38, 44-46
For example, Syria was developing an undeclared nuclear program until it was destroyed by Israel in 2007 and the IAEA is currently investigating traces of enriched uranium found in Egypt in May 2009. Iran, Syria and Egypt are all signatories to the NPT.\textsuperscript{143}

Although Israel has strictly adhered to its nuclear opacity and has repeatedly refused to enter into international non-proliferation regimes, there has been a slight but significant change in nuance to its public policies: Israeli policy-makers have begun reaffirming Israel’s long standing commitment to norms of security, responsibility, accountability and restraint in the nuclear domain. For example, in 2008, IAEC spokeswoman Nili Lifshitz, stated that “Israel is not a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, but it is a responsible country that is a member of all the safety committees of the International Agency of Atomic Energy.”\textsuperscript{144} More recently, in September 2009, Director General of the IAEC Dr. Shaul Chorev, stated that “it has been Israel’s long standing policy of supporting and wherever possible, joining arms control and other international treaties… Israel has continued to contribute to the global non-proliferation regime, through its policy of responsible behavior and restraint in the nuclear domain.”\textsuperscript{145} This language has allowed Israel to hint at its nuclear weapons capability and indicate its commitment to the ideals of the NPT while remaining within the limits of its nuclear opacity.\textsuperscript{146}

It is reasonable to expect Israel to reaffirm these commitments in similar statements in the future, particularly if it maintains its policy of nuclear ambiguity. On the other

\textsuperscript{143} Heinrich, High-enriched Uranium Traces found in Egypt: IAEA; Karsh, Navias, Israeli Nuclear Weapons and Middle East Peace, pp.88-91; Spector, Cohen, Israel’s Airstrike on Syria’s Reactor: Implications for the Nonproliferation Regime
\textsuperscript{144} Ilani, Sorek Particle Accelerator to Open Doors in Decade
\textsuperscript{145} Chorev, Director General of the IAEC, Israel Statement to the IAEA, p.3
\textsuperscript{146} Chorev, Director General of the IAEC, Israel Statement to the IAEA, pp.3-7; IISS, Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran, pp.126-128; Ilani, Sorek Particle Accelerator to Open Doors in Decade
hand, if Israel transitioned to an openly declared nuclear stance, it is unlikely that Israel will commit to a process of disarmament or become a signatory to the NPT. This is based on the assumption that if Israel decided to declare its nuclear capabilities, it would do so in order to enhance its deterrence and national security. However, it is possible that Israel will continue to commit to accountability and responsibility in the nuclear domain, regardless of its nuclear stance.

A Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East

In contrast to the NPT, which calls for international disarmament, a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East has been discussed as a regional alternative. This would be established through a signed and ratified regional treaty, in which all parties commit to peaceful nuclear purposes and international safeguards. In addition, all involved countries would agree not to produce, acquire, test or deploy any nuclear weapons.\footnote{147 Barnaby, \textit{The Invisible Bomb}, pp.161-162}

Discussions regarding a NWFZ in the Middle East have been ongoing for decades. In 1963, the Soviet Union presented Israel and its Arab neighbors with the first NWFZ proposal and in 1974, the UNGA adopted a resolution, introduced by Egypt,\footnote{148 According to Shai Feldman, Iran introduced this resolution.} titled ‘Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone in the Region of the Middle East.’ In both instances Israel expressed general agreement with the NWFZ principles, but did not support the specific proposals.\footnote{149 Barnaby, \textit{The Invisible Bomb}, pp.158-159; Shalom, \textit{Israel’s Nuclear Option}, pp.43-44}

Israel has asserted that a NWFZ agreement should be included in a larger disarmament and regional security agreement, which includes both conventional and non-
conventional weapons. Based on this, a NWFZ can be discussed only after all countries in the Middle East, including Iran, acknowledge Israel's right to exist and agree to enter into security pacts and comprehensive peace agreements with Israel. To that end, in October 1980, Israel submitted a draft resolution to the UNGA, which called upon all countries in the Middle East and the adjacent region to convene a conference for negotiating a multilateral treaty. Israel’s motivation for submitting the draft resolution was to express a positive position on nuclear arms control. However, the Arab states unanimously rejected the resolution and it was withdrawn shortly after its submission.150

In contrast to Israel’s approach to establishing a NWFZ, the Arab countries argue that a NWFZ would require all Middle Eastern countries to accede to the NPT, but would not require its own series of negotiations. Therefore, they are unwilling to negotiate a NWFZ as part of a larger peace process in the region.151

US President George W. Bush made another attempt towards establishing a NWFZ in 1991. He proposed a non-proliferation regime in the Middle East based on a phased process of arms control. This proposal called on all countries in the Middle East to join the NPT and international conventions banning the use of chemical, biological and other weapons of mass destruction. In addition, it required a freeze on Israel’s Dimona facility, which would halt Israel’s nuclear arsenal at its existing levels and allow Dimona to complete its natural lifespan (about 30 years) without renewal. Bush’s initiative was

150 Barnaby, Capping Israel’s Nuclear Volcano, pp.108-111; Barnaby, The Invisible Bomb, pp.162-164; Chorev, Director General of the IAEC, Israel Statement to the IAEA, pp.3-5; Feldman, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East, pp.249-250; Melman, Loss of Nuclear Monopoly – An Israeli Nightmare; Shalom, Israel’s Nuclear Option, pp.43-44
151 Ibid.
suggested as an interim step towards a NWFZ; however, neither Israel nor the Arab states supported the idea and it was not pursued.\(^\text{152}\)

Israel views the NWFZ as a substitute for the NPT. Accordingly, Israel cites its support of the NWFZ proposal as justification for its rejection of the NPT. The NWFZ proposal was “a convenient diplomatic way for Israel to keep its nuclear monopoly unaddressed… [The NWFZ] could work in tandem with Israel’s existing policy of nuclear opacity and inhibit the progress of any incremental nuclear-arms-control dialogue.”\(^\text{153}\) This prevents Israel from being in a situation that requires disclosure of its nuclear capabilities.\(^\text{154}\)

In September 2009, Israel reaffirmed its commitment to the vision of a NWFZ in the Middle East and announced that the Government of Israel (GOI) had approved Israel’s long-term goals towards this vision. However, Israel reiterated the significance of direct negotiations and confidence-building measures as an interim step towards a NWFZ. Therefore, it is unlikely that this commitment to the vision of a NWFZ in the Middle East will develop into any concrete steps in the near future.\(^\text{155}\)

Israel’s nuclear policies are often weighed from both sides of a complex dilemma: The pro-nuclear argument is derived from the assertion that nuclear weapons are necessary for ensuring Israel’s survival and preventing another Holocaust. The anti-nuclear argument, partially derived from Holocaust trauma, asserts that Israeli nuclear weapons will lead to proliferation of Arab nuclear weapons and to deterioration of


\(^{153}\) IISS, *Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran*, p.126

\(^{154}\) Feldman, *Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East*, pp.250-252; IISS, *Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran*, pp.126-128

\(^{155}\) Chorev, *Director General of the IAEC, Israel Statement to the IAEA*, pp.4-5
Israel’s security. Based on the anti-nuclear argument, some experts believe that Israel’s nuclear weapons are self-defeating and Israel’s nuclear ambiguity policies have hindered Israel’s strategic and political aims. They argue that Israel should refocus its nuclear policies towards non-proliferation and perhaps a NWFZ in the Middle East. For example, Ze’ev Maoz asserts that Israel’s nuclear policy can be used as a negotiating card. He suggests that Israel disclose its nuclear capabilities and renounce them in return for verifiable regional disarmament agreements. However, this can only be accomplished once the link between Israel’s nuclear capabilities and security is broken. Further, Maoz’s proposal would require reliable institutions and regional arrangements that enable the peaceful resolution of disputes, ensure transparency, and guarantee security to all parties.\(^{156}\)

In contrast to the argument that Israel should move towards disarmament, some experts believe that Israel’s security would be harmed by a NWFZ. For instance, Rene Louis Beres compares nuclear disarmament to “national suicide.”\(^{157}\) He argues that if Israel abandoned its nuclear weapons in favor of “misconceived hopes for regional cooperation”\(^{158}\) it would become vulnerable to overwhelming attacks, both conventional and unconventional. This is based on the assumption that parallel steps by Israel’s enemies are unlikely and compliance verification would be extremely difficult. Accordingly, it is unreasonable to expect Israel to begin a process of nuclear disarmament, particularly as Iran develops a nuclear weapon. In other words, “[t]he problem is that the NWFZ vision is not anchored in the current political reality of the

\(^{156}\) IISS, *Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran*, pp.125-126; Maoz, *The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy*, pp.45-59, 76-77

\(^{157}\) Beres, Maoz, *Correspondence: Israel and the Bomb*, p.175

\(^{158}\) Ibid.
Middle East; for Israel [the NWFZ] is conditional on peaceful relations among all members of the zone, which does not appear possible as long as the current regime remains in place in Iran. ¹⁵⁹ ¹⁶⁰

If Israel were to shift its nuclear posture from nuclear ambiguity to nuclear disclosure, renewed calls would arise from the international community for nuclear disarmament. As such, it is likely that renewed discussions regarding the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East will emerge as well. However, in light of Israel’s and the Arabs’ differing approaches regarding the manner in which a NWFZ would be negotiated, it appears unlikely to evolve as a solution in the near future, regardless of Israel’s nuclear posture. This is particularly the case as more countries in the Middle East move towards, rather than away from, developing their own nuclear programs.

**Iran**

On the nuclear spectrum, Iran’s ongoing nuclear weapons program is diametrically opposed to non-proliferation regimes such as NWFZs and the NPT. Iran’s alarming nuclear weapons program and its unwillingness to cooperate with the international community has become a great concern for Israel and is extremely likely to influence Israel’s future nuclear policies.

Iran began developing its nuclear capabilities in the 1950’s with the assistance of Western countries, including France, Germany, the UK and the US. In the late 1970’s, Iran’s relations with the West began to deteriorate and as a result of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, all ties between Iran and the West were severed. However, work on Iran’s

¹⁵⁹ IISS, *Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran*, p.138
¹⁶⁰ Barnaby, *The Invisible Bomb*, pp.165-166; Beres, Maoz, *Correspondence: Israel and the Bomb*, pp.175-178; IISS, *Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran*, pp.137-138
nuclear program continued despite its alienation from the West, due to Iran’s cooperation with China and Russia. In 2002, Iran revealed that it was developing a covert nuclear program, raising international concerns regarding the nature of Iran’s nuclear program.\(^{161}\)

Although Iran has repeatedly stated that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, Iran’s behavior has suggested otherwise. Iran has failed to provide the IAEA with significant documents, evaded questions regarding the nature of its program, hindered IAEA inspections on its nuclear facilities, and avoided international sanctions by dragging out negotiations. There is no concrete evidence that Iran possess nuclear weapons at this point, however, a number of reports have determined that Iran has the necessary knowledge for developing a nuclear weapons capability and there is strong evidence to suggest military involvement in Iran’s nuclear program. As a result, many experts and decision-makers have expressed concern that the international community has failed in preventing Iran’s rapidly progressing nuclear weapons capability.\(^{162}\)

Iran’s ongoing nuclear progress is particularly concerning for Israel. Iran’s belligerence towards Israel, exhibited through Holocaust denial and statements that ‘Israel should be wiped off the map,’ in combination with its vigorous pursuit of a nuclear weapon, has led Israel to view Iran as an existential threat. This is compounded by Iran’s activities in Syria and Lebanon through the Hezbollah, as well as Iran’s activities in the Gaza Strip through Hamas.\(^{163}\)

Iran’s nuclear activities have significant impact on Israel’s nuclear policies. As discussed in chapter two, some experts believe that Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity

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\(^{161}\) Bruno, *Iran’s Nuclear Program*; Feldman, *Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East*, pp.47-53; US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Iran: Where We Are Today*, pp.3-10

\(^{162}\) Ibid.

\(^{163}\) IISS, *Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran*, pp.136-137
has prevented existential attacks. Based on this, Israel would benefit from maintaining its current nuclear policies in spite of the Iranian threat: “Israeli policy-makers would see more benefit in maintaining their policy of ambiguity and letting Iran bear the brunt of international opprobrium if [Iran] declared its nuclear capability.”164 However, as Israel faced an increased existential threat, it would be required to signal that it has the ability to retaliate from a devastating attack without fully disclosing its nuclear capabilities.165

In contrast to experts who argue that Israel should maintain its nuclear ambiguity, some experts believe that Israel should transition to a declared nuclear weapons capability as Iran continues to develop its nuclear weapons program. The common assumption is that if Iran were to test a nuclear weapon, Israel would have to follow suit in order to deter the existential threat. “This raises the further possibility that even if Israel chose not to adopt a nuclear posture in order to deter Arab massive or limited conventional attacks, it might eventually be forced to adopt such a posture in response to Arab acquisition of nuclear weapons.”166 Thus, it is reasonable to assume that as Iran gets closer to completing its nuclear bomb, more experts are likely to suggest that Israel transition to a declarative nuclear policy.167

Some experts anticipate a future scenario in which both Israel and Iran have openly declared nuclear weapons programs. This scenario raises significant concerns. Despite the possibility of mutual deterrence between Israel and Iran, there is concern about the likelihood of miscalculations that could escalate into large-scale violence. Further, Iran

164 Ibid., pp.137
165 Ibid., pp.137-138
166 Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, p.83
167 Beres, Reconsidering Israel’s Nuclear Ambiguity; Beres, Maoz, Correspondence: Israel and the Bomb, pp.176-177; IISS, Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran, pp.136-137
might transfer its nuclear weapons to non-state actors, causing Israel to face additional nuclear threats in the region.168

Based on this grim scenario, if Israel were to switch to a declarative nuclear policy, it would have to do so in a calculated fashion that includes defining a distinct set of ‘red lines’ and determining the criteria for when Iran or other enemies pass the ‘point of no return.’ Furthermore, Israel would have to clearly communicate its willingness to take action if these lines are crossed.169

To be sure, a nuclear armed Iran would erase Israel’s current nuclear monopoly, creating a bipolar and potentially multipolar Middle East. In light of the existential threat Iran poses, this type of instability would be intolerable for Israel. It is unreasonable to expect Israel to tolerate a nuclear armed Iran. “There is no chance at all that Israel will reconcile itself to living with a strategic threat posed by the ayatollahs’ regime in Iran… Indeed by 2005 Israel had already decided that it was not prepared to come to terms with such a change in the status quo.”170 At the current juncture, most Israeli experts assert that negotiations and sanctions can have a strong impact on Iran. If that fails, Israel would prefer US military intervention over using its own force. However many experts expect Israel to take action if the situation becomes too dangerous for Israel’s existence. As such, Israeli policy-makers have repeatedly stated that Israel is prepared to do whatever is necessary to protect itself and prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. For example, in November 2008, Israel Air Force (IAF) Commander, Major General Ido Nehustan, stated that “the Air Force is a very robust and flexible force… [and is] ready to

168 Ibid.
169 Ibid.
do whatever is demanded.” Based on this and similar statements, many believe that Israel might choose to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities (with or without a ‘green light’ from the US) in a manner similar to its actions in Iraq and Syria.

It remains unclear how Iran’s nuclear progress will affect Israel’s nuclear policies regarding its own nuclear program. To date, when discussing the Iranian issue, Israeli policy-makers have not signaled any intention of disclosing its own nuclear program beyond the current opacity. However, this is not to say that such a move is impossible or unlikely. A key factor in such a policy shift might be Israeli public opinion regarding its security and deterrence, which could move towards nuclear disclosure as the population feels increasingly threatened.

The Democratic Nature of Israel’s Nuclear Program and Israeli Public Opinion

When the IAEC was founded in 1952, it was established through a secret executive order and was not enshrined in any form of legislation. To date, Israel’s nuclear program remains unlegislated and essentially exists in a legal vacuum. This is possible through a legal loophole that allows the government to act on behalf of the state in any way it sees fit, as long as that action is not prohibited in law and does not defy any Supreme Court rulings.

Due to its hidden nature, Israel’s nuclear program and policies have never been subject to any comprehensive evaluation or parliamentary and public oversight. In fact, Israel’s nuclear opacity prevents even Israel’s legal and political elites from openly

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171 Jerusalem Post Staff, *IAF is Ready for Iran’s Nuclear Sites*
173 Cohen, *Nuclear Legislation for Israel*, pp.2-4, 7-11
discussing the issue of nuclear legislation. As a result of the lack of debate, Israel’s legal
and political elites are able to maintain a strong public consensus regarding the role of
Israel’s nuclear program and policies.\textsuperscript{174}

Some experts have called for a shift from nuclear ambiguity to nuclear transparency
has been called for in order to increase the program’s political oversight. Undoubtedly,
developing nuclear legislation in Israel would be highly sensitive and extremely
complicated. However, nuclear legislation would facilitate the development of a nuclear
doctrine which could ultimately reduce the possibility of misuse and improve the
coordination between Israel’s weapons development and nuclear needs.\textsuperscript{175}

The symbolic nature of a discussion or legislative measure related to the IAEC or
Israel’s nuclear activities would be considerable. Any public debate on the issue would
require a significant amount of expert input and could destroy Israel’s nuclear ambiguity
policy, potentially damaging Israel’s security. Despite this, some experts assert that the
act of debating and drafting such legislation would not necessarily conflict with Israel’s
policies of ambiguity. This is based on the assumption that if the debate were to take
place with varying degrees of delicacy and vagueness, it is possible to balance the
requirements of Israel’s existing policies of nuclear ambiguity with Israel’s need for
nuclear regulation.\textsuperscript{176}

It should be noted that although there is little public information on the issue, Israel
does have a formal chain of command, which determines when Israel’s nuclear weapons

\textsuperscript{174} Barnaby, \textit{The Invisible Bomb}, pp.50-52; Cohen, \textit{Nuclear Legislation for Israel}, pp.7-9; Feldman,
\textit{Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East}, pp.98-99; IISS, \textit{Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran}, p.124
\textsuperscript{175} Barnaby, \textit{The Invisible Bomb}, pp.52-53; Beres, Maoz, \textit{Correspondence: Israel and the Bomb}, pp.179-
180; Cohen, \textit{Nuclear Legislation for Israel}, pp.11-16; Feldman, \textit{Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s}, pp.18-20, 147-149; Maoz, \textit{The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy}, p.73-76
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
can be armed and fired. This chain of command includes the prime minister, the minister of defense, the chief of staff and the head of the IAF. Additionally, there are various advisory panels which consist of senior scientists, army officers, economists and other experts, all holding top security clearances. Thus, “while these secret bodies do not meet the broad definition of democratic control of nuclear weapons, they do reflect the recognition within the bureaucracy that a system of civilian guardianship must include mechanisms of review and oversee the nuclear program.”\textsuperscript{177, 178}

Even so, there is a general reluctance on the part of decision-makers and scholars to openly discuss Israel’s need for nuclear legislation. As a result, the Israeli public faces an interesting paradox regarding the democratic nature of Israel’s nuclear policies: although the public has a right to know, the Israeli public often has lacked a comprehensive view and open debate regarding the nuclear issue. In essence, “[i]n a most democratic fashion, the public surrenders its fundamental democratic right to information.”\textsuperscript{179, 180}

To be sure, there are differing views among Israeli population regarding the acceptability of nuclear weapons and the success of Israel’s nuclear policies. However, public opinion polls have shown that the majority of Israelis view nuclear weapons as a guarantee of Israel’s existence and Israel’s nuclear policy enjoys broad public support. For example, a survey conducted in 1993 concluded that 71 percent of the respondents supported maintaining Israel’s nuclear opacity, while only 29 percent preferred adopting an overt nuclear posture. This viewpoint is changing, however, as more Israelis believe their existence is threatened by regional nuclear programs. For example, another survey

\textsuperscript{177} IISS, \textit{Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran}. p.129
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., pp.128-129
\textsuperscript{179} Cohen, \textit{Nuclear Legislation for Israel}, p.7
\textsuperscript{180} Barnaby, \textit{The Invisible Bomb}, pp.50-52; Cohen, \textit{Nuclear Legislation for Israel}, pp.7-13; IISS, \textit{Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran}, p.124
conducted in 1998, concluded that approximately 66 percent of those surveyed believed that Israel should keep its nuclear weapons a secret. Despite the decrease in support for Israel’s nuclear ambiguity, these numbers demonstrate that the policy maintains general support from the public at this juncture.\textsuperscript{181}

The Israeli public generally considers Israel’s policies of nuclear ambiguity as a success, having provided Israel with all the benefits of nuclear deterrence without the political cost. As previously discussed, some Israelis believe that its nuclear weapons policies have made it possible for Israel to pursue peace negotiations with its neighbors. Furthermore, Israelis typically view nuclear weapons as an important part of Israel’s deterrence strategy. This is influenced by the public’s view that Israel exists in a hostile neighborhood and is permanently under siege with a very narrow margin of error. Moreover, many Israelis believe that regional agreements in the Middle East are unreliable; a feeling that is exacerbated by Israel’s strained relationship with the international community and the UN.\textsuperscript{182, 183}

Essentially, the Israeli public views its nuclear program as a vital component of Israel’s deterrence strategy, and its policies of nuclear ambiguity as a vital component of its nuclear program. This makes it politically impossible for Israel’s leaders to jeopardize its nuclear program, even at the expense of a transition in nuclear policies. Policy-makers


\textsuperscript{182} Many Israelis often feel that the international community is unfair in its moral condemnations of Israel and pro-Arab for political or economic gain.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
are unlikely to transition to a transparent nuclear doctrine if they believed it would risk the nuclear program.\textsuperscript{184}

As the threat from Iran increases, it is possible that more domestic calls for Israel to openly declare its nuclear capabilities will arise. This poses a dilemma for the development of nuclear legislation: On one hand, a shift in Israel’s nuclear policies could instigate a public debate regarding the need for nuclear legislation. On the other hand, the Iranian threat is likely to reinforce the public’s reluctance to engage in any debate regarding nuclear legislation, maintaining its trust in Israel’s military and defense echelon.\textsuperscript{185}

In light of the near complete silence within the Israeli population regarding Israel’s nuclear program, including the media, academia and policy-makers, there is little information regarding current public opinion views on Israel’s nuclear ambiguity policy. By extension, very few calls emanate from within the Israeli population to shift to nuclear disclosure and it is reasonable to assume that the Israeli public is satisfied with Israel’s nuclear stance. However, the Israeli public has typically relied on its decision-makers to make the choices necessary to maintain Israel’s security at its highest levels. If Israel’s decision-makers determined that a shift to a declared nuclear position would benefit Israel’s deterrence posture, it is likely that the public consensus would follow suit.

\textsuperscript{184} Beres, Maoz, \textit{Correspondence: Israel and the Bomb}, pp.179-180; Cohen, \textit{Nuclear Legislation for Israel}, pp.11-14; Feldman, \textit{Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s}, pp.18-20, 147-149; Maoz, \textit{The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy}, p.73-76

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
War and Disarmament

Some experts believe that since Hiroshima and Nagasaki occurred, all nuclear weapons countries have enjoyed a higher status in the international community, either through international recognition or through strategic superiority. Libya, North Korea and India are often used as examples of such countries. Iran has also benefitted from the international community’s focus since the disclosure of its nuclear program, and it is likely that the country will receive increased attention as Iran continues to resist international pressures.186

As the international community’s focus has turned towards nuclear weapons and non-proliferation, pressure on Israel’s nuclear program has been mounting as well. Most recently, in September 2009, the IAEA’s General Assembly passed two resolutions, one calling for a NWFZ in the Middle East and another specifically calling on Israel to sign the NPT. Both resolutions passed, despite abstentions by the US and other Western countries.187

In 1995, Shimon Peres said: “Give me peace and I will give up nuclear weapons.”188 This statement, which reflects the belief that Israel’s nuclear deterrence must be maintained as long as its security is challenged, continues to hold true today. Consequentially, Israel appears unlikely to join the NPT or a NWFZ in the Middle East in the near future, despite its repeated affirmation of non-proliferation principles. Both Israel’s policy-makers and public consensus maintain the conviction that only after peace has been established and passed the test of time, Israel’s nuclear disarmament will be

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186 Ben, Entry into the Nuclear Club
187 Melman, IAEA calls on Israel to sign Non-Proliferation Treaty; NTI, IAEA Members Call for Nuclear Weapon-Free Middle East
188 Feldman, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East, p.258
possible. This reality seems to be decreasing in probability as Iran forges ahead with its own nuclear weapons program and additional countries in the Middle East have begun to develop nuclear programs.

The international environment makes it difficult to determine if and when it will shift its nuclear stance. As discussed above, many experts believe that Israel should transition to a declared nuclear capability once Iran reaches a nuclear weapons threshold. However Israel has stated that it does not intend to allow Iran to become a nuclear weapons state, and if Israel’s statement holds true, it is possible that Israel will be able to maintain its nuclear opacity stance. Nevertheless, some experts have expressed doubts that an Israeli strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities will be sufficient to destroy its nuclear weapons program. In that case, Israel might find itself in a position where it is forced to reevaluate its nuclear policies and shift towards an openly declared nuclear posture.

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Conclusion:

Should Israel Alter its Policy of Nuclear Ambiguity?
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Since its inception, Israel’s nuclear program has evolved into a vital component of its national security strategy, fulfilling Ben-Gurion’s vision of a strong and independent Israel that can guarantee its own survival. At the core of Israel’s nuclear program is its policy of nuclear ambiguity.

Nuclear ambiguity is comprised of two elements: secrecy and signaling. Secrecy enabled Israel to develop and maintain nuclear weapons without formally announcing their existence. Signaling enabled Israel to hint at its capabilities, through rumors, leaks, veiled statements and political actions, allowing Israel to maintain its strategic deterrence. By using an effective combination of secrecy and signaling, Israel has maximized its advantages while minimizing the adverse political, military, and diplomatic ramifications of its nuclear program.\textsuperscript{190}

Overall, Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity has been successful for five decades. This policy has allowed Israel to bolster its security and conduct normalized foreign relations, without upsetting regional stability. Moreover, despite various public exposures and international pressure to disclose its capabilities, Israel has succeeded in maintaining its policy of nuclear ambiguity. As a result, “[t]he fundamentals of Israel’s nuclear capabilities and policies, though never officially confirmed, are accepted as fact throughout the world.”\textsuperscript{191}

This thesis examined the main elements of Israel’s nuclear weapons policy, by looking at its history, present and possible futures. The purpose of this discussion was to answer the question: "Should Israel maintain its policy of nuclear ambiguity?" Or should

\textsuperscript{190} Maoz, \textit{The Mixed Blessing of Israel's Nuclear Policy}, p.47
\textsuperscript{191} IISS, \textit{Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East, In the Shadow of Iran}, p.119
Israel transition to an openly declared nuclear policy? There is not a clear answer to either of these questions.

Chapter one outlined the development of Israel’s nuclear program and the evolution of Israel’s nuclear policies, which were greatly influenced by the US-Israel relationship. After a period of evading US and international pressures, Israel codified its nuclear ambiguity policy, which consisted of vaguely worded statements that enabled Israel to avoid inaccuracies while concealing information Israel did not wish to share.

Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity effectively allowed Israel to develop its nuclear program without facing the pressure and ramifications from openly declaring its nuclear project. As a result, Israel became a de facto nuclear weapons state, boosting its deterrence and enhancing its strategic posture. An examination of Israel’s successful nuclear history and policies, suggests that Israel is unlikely to shift its nuclear ambiguity policies to an open nuclear stance in the near future.

Chapter two examined the four main elements that impact Israel’s nuclear stance. These elements are: 1) Israel’s strategic deterrence, 2) the potential for a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race, 3) the ongoing Arab-Israel peace process, and, 4) the strength of the US-Israel relationship. Separately evaluating these elements provides a clear overview of Israel’s nuclear policy rationale and enables a deeper examination of how these elements would be affected by an Israeli transition to an open nuclear policy.

In the current Middle Eastern environment, Israel’s strategic posture as an opaque nuclear monopoly provides a strong deterrent, allowing Israel to fight terrorism and maintain its QME, without risking escalation. Israel’s Samson Option also provides Israel with the deterrence it requires for existential threats. As a result, given the current
strategic environment, it is unclear if Israel’s deterrence would greatly benefit from a shift in nuclear stance.

Israel’s deterrence levels might decrease, however, if an additional country in the Middle East developed nuclear weapons. In such a scenario, Israel’s nuclear opacity could become an ineffective deterrent, requiring Israel to reevaluate its nuclear posture. Some experts believe this has already occurred. Based on the argument that Israel’s nuclear ambiguity is currently irrelevant, Israel’s deterrence would benefit by removing the ambiguity from its nuclear doctrine and switching to nuclear disclosure.

An Israeli nuclear declaration likely would be interpreted by Arab states as a provocation. However, Israel’s deterrence would remain intact, even if Arab states reacted by adopting nuclear deterrence postures as well. This is based on the assumption that Israel’s survival is of greater importance to Israel, than Israel’s destruction is to its enemies. Thus, the balance of deterrence will remain tilted in Israel’s favor. The same is true for Israel’s Samson Option: “Indeed, it is the certainty of Israel’s nuclear capability—not its ambiguity—that makes a credible deterrent for situations of true last resort.”

An Israeli nuclear disclosure would be unlikely to spur a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race, despite Arab declarations linking Israel’s nuclear capabilities to Arab security. The increased interest in Arab nuclear programs is a direct result of self-interest and Arab rivalries, not the potential threat of an Israeli nuclear weapon. It is reasonable to assume that the Arabs already factor Israel’s nuclear program into their calculations.

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192 Cohen, Israel and Chemical/Biological Weapons: History, Deterrence and Arms Control, p.48
Nevertheless, in light of Iran’s aggressive quest for nuclear weapons, the potential for a nuclear arms race in the Middle East does exist, in which case, Israel’s strategic posture would benefit from a shift to declared nuclear weapons capability.

If Israel declared its nuclear weapons capability, Israel’s relationship with its Arab neighbors would be harmed in the short-term. However, there is little indication that the Arab-Israeli peace process would be permanently terminated. After an initial period of adjustment, Israel might be able to encourage the Arabs to continue the peace process by communicating that its nuclear weapons capability does not pose a threat to the Arabs, unless Israel is provoked. Once the parties returned to the negotiating table, Israel would be in a position to make additional political concessions, while maintaining its strategic deterrence, due to its new nuclear stance.

Similar to the expected Arab response to an Israeli nuclear declaration, Israel should not anticipate overwhelming approval from the US. US-Israel relations would undoubtedly be challenged as a result of an Israeli shift in posture. As such, Israel would have to conduct its transition in a manner palpable to US interests, in order to maintain its strong relationship with the US. However, after an initial period of adjustment, it could be expected that the US-Israel relationship would be unharmed in the long-term.

Based on the four elements discussed in chapter two, it is difficult to determine if Israel would benefit from maintaining its policy of nuclear ambiguity or from shifting to a policy of nuclear transparency. To be sure, Israel’s current strategic posture is strong and enables Israel to maintain its deterrence, pursue Arab-Israel peace negotiations and cultivate a close relationship with the US. The current status quo is changing, however,
and Israel might find itself facing new considerations that would sway it towards shifting
to a declared nuclear stance.

Chapter three examined the international environment and non-proliferation regimes
that affect Israel’s nuclear policies. Regional developments, such as Iran’s aggressive
nuclear weapons program and the upcoming NPT review conference, pose an interesting
dilemma for Israel. On one hand, Israel should expect additional pressure to disclose its
nuclear program and begin a process of disarmament, in light of the 2010 NPT review
conference and the international non-proliferation agenda. On the other hand, as long as
Iran continues to forge ahead with its own program and threaten Israel’s existence, Israel
is unlikely to disarm its nuclear weapons. In fact, Iran’s nuclear program might
eventually force Israel’s bomb out of the basement, requiring the international non-
proliferation community to reevaluate their own views and stance on Israel’s nuclear
posture.

Iran’s ongoing pursuit of nuclear weapons is currently the strongest argument in favor
of a shift in Israel’s nuclear policies. In the event of a nuclear-armed Iran, some experts
assert that Israel’s defense strategies would be harmed if Israel failed to disclose its
nuclear capabilities. “Left unchallenged, doubts could surely undermine Israeli nuclear
deterrence.”194 As such, rather than maintain an “almost a minimal, verbal-diplomatic
game,”195 Israel should begin a process of transitioning to an open nuclear posture.

In order to maintain control over the process, Israel should conduct a premeditated
end to its nuclear opacity, before it is forced to disclose its nuclear capabilities out of
duress. An Israeli shift of nuclear policy would be a significant signal to Israel’s enemies

194 Beres, Maoz, Correspondence: Israel and the Bomb, p.177
195 Aronson, Brosh, The Policies and Strategy of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East: Opacity, Theory
and Reality, 1960-1991, p.182
and could underscore Israel’s willingness to use its nuclear force if faced with an existential threat. In essence, if Israel were to properly time its public acknowledgment of nuclear capabilities, it could eliminate doubts about Israel’s nuclear resolve and this would, in turn, boost Israel’s deterrence. Based on this scenario, some experts suggest that Israel disclose its capabilities when Iran is close to completing its own nuclear capabilities, putting "a prompt end to deliberate nuclear ambiguity."196 197

There is no doubt that a shift in Israel’s nuclear policies would have serious political and strategic risks. Ultimately, “[m]aking the decision whether or not to alter Israel’s strategy from conventional defense/offense to overt nuclear deterrence promises to be an extremely agonizing process. It is very difficult to weigh the advantages of the adoption of an overt nuclear deterrent against its inherent risks. The costs and benefits do not lend themselves to common measurement.”198

A well-timed gradual disclosure would enable Israeli decision-makers to manage the delicate balance of risks and opportunities that Israel is sure to face during its transitional period. The disclosure process should be conducted in a calculated manner, through the deliberate release of relevant details regarding Israel’s nuclear positions, intentions and capabilities.199

The timing of a deliberate and gradual Israeli nuclear disclosure is significant. If Israel were to wait until the last moment to disclose its nuclear capabilities, Israel’s enemies might assume that it is simply trying to bluff its way out of a crisis. Israel must

196 Beres, Reconsidering Israel’s Nuclear Ambiguity
197 Beres, Reconsidering Israel’s Nuclear Ambiguity; Beres, Maoz, Correspondence: Israel and the Bomb, pp.176-178
198 Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s, p.237
199 Beres, Reconsidering Israel’s Nuclear Ambiguity; Beres, Israel’s Bomb in the Basement: A Revisiting of “Deliberate Ambiguity” vs. “Disclosure,” p.113; Beres, Maoz, Correspondence: Israel and the Bomb, pp.176-177; Shalom, Israel’s Nuclear Option, pp.174-178
announce the existence of its deterrent well before the estimated time of events it seeks to deter. Furthermore, gradual disclosure will allow Israel sufficient time to bolster its deterrence while managing the adverse effects the disclosure will cause.\footnote{200 Feldman, \textit{Israeli Nuclear Deterrence, A Strategy for the 1980s}, pp.15-18} 

Israel will have to use strong persuasion in order to convince its allies and enemies that it is a responsible nuclear weapons state and that it will not resort to use of its weapons unless absolutely provoked. This can be conducted though a strong public affairs campaign that explains Israel’s need for an open nuclear deterrent and spells out the benefits of such a posture. Israel’s campaign would have to target US political elites, including the White House, US Congress, and American Jewry, as well as international political elites, the media and academic communities.\footnote{201 Ibid., pp.226-233} \footnote{202 Ibid., p.232} “Israel would have to be able to present a strong case in support of the proposition that the adoption of [an open nuclear posture] reduces the odds of war and is not detrimental to regional or global stability.”\footnote{203 Ibid., p.228} 

The political make-up of the White House at the time of Israel’s disclosure will impact the US reception of the disclosure: “A highly popular president, dedicated to liberal causes, influential in the Congress and well on top of his job, could give a prohibitive American response to Israeli nuclearization.”\footnote{203 Ibid., p.228} Conversely, a president with low approval ratings or with a hostile congress might be less inclined to react harshly, particularly if he or she is not focused on international disarmament during the time of disclosure. Regardless of the US’s political character at the time of Israel’s disclosure, in order to maintain a strong relationship with the US, Israel would have to conduct its
transition in a manner that is palpable to the US and perhaps even with US coordination.  

When shifting its nuclear posture, Israel will have to address its commitment not to be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. Clearly, if Israel declared its nuclear weapons capability after Iran completed its quest for nuclear weapons, Israel’s commitment would be kept intact. However, Israel also has stated that it will not be the second country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. Given this commitment, in the event that the international community is unsuccessful at halting Iran’s nuclear program, Israel might find it necessary to shift to an open nuclear stance, despite its prior commitment. Thus, Israel must address this issue as part of its public affairs campaign.

It is unreasonable to expect that a transition to nuclear transparency will include revelations of all aspects of Israel’s nuclear program. None of the existing nuclear weapons states are completely transparent. However, if Israel were to openly declare its nuclear program, we might expect to learn more regarding the nuclear program’s history, strategic doctrine, and accountability and oversight processes.

Cohen notes that a successful Israeli transition from nuclear opacity to disclosure requires three preconditions: 1) an appropriate regional context, 2) careful preparation and coordination with the US, and, 3) progress in global arms control and disarmament. Based on these three preconditions, Israel might consider disclosing its nuclear weapons and immediately entering into NPT negotiations. It could be expected that Israel’s negotiations regarding the NPT would be a drawn-out process, yielding few positive

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204 Ibid., pp.226-228
205 Cohen, Israel and Chemical/Biological Weapons: History, Deterrence and Arms Control, pp.346-347
results. However, the act of entering into NPT negotiations would enable Israel to bolster its nuclear deterrence posture and appease the disarmament community, without having to commit to disarmament.206

Israel’s nuclear history demonstrates that the Jewish state consistently relies on the repeated behavior of “postponing decisions as long as possible and ultimately making them under external pressure.”207 It is reasonable to expect similar behavior regarding an Israeli transition to a declared nuclear status. Particularly in light of the fact that “the Israeli defense establishment is firmly opposed to any change… [and] Public opinion in Israel has never been in favor of opening the nuclear question to public scrutiny and debate.”208 209

As discussed, Israel’s decision- and policy-makers seem committed to Israel’s current policy of nuclear ambiguity, and have not engaged in any public debate regarding the benefits of a transition. Furthermore, the Israeli public is content leaving the issue in the hands of Israel’s policy-makers. As a result, the debate regarding the future of Israel’s nuclear policies has been conducted solely on an academic level.210 Thus, it is difficult to anticipate the direction Israel’s nuclear policies will take as changes occur in the international environment.

From day one of its nuclear history, Israel’s has maintained a delicate balance with its nuclear policies to ensure Israel’s independent survival while appeasing the international

206 Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, pp.347-348
207 Ibid., p.320
210 Aver Cohen’s forthcoming study on Israel’s nuclear opacity, which will be published by the Columbia University Press in 2010, should be of interest in furthering this discussion. (Cohen, *Nuclear Legislation for Israel*, p.17)
community. In an Independence Day address in 1955, Ben-Gurion stated that “The future of Israel [is] not dependent on what the gentiles say, but on what the Jews do.”\textsuperscript{211} The same holds true today.

\textsuperscript{211} Cohen, Israel and the Bomb, p.43
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27. Ilani, Ofri, *Sorek Particle Accelerator to Open Doors in Decade*, Ha’aretz, October 29, 2008


