# The Value of Nuclear Ambiguity in the Face of a Nuclear Iran

## Adam Raz

Iran's nuclear progress raises anew an issue that has received little public attention in this context, namely, Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity. A question that decision makers will have to confront if and when Iran acquires a nuclear capability is: should Israel revise and perhaps even terminate its policy of nuclear ambiguity and instead adopt a policy of explicit nuclear deterrence?

The current debate focuses on "the day after" Iran's nuclearization. The following essay argues that in a scenario in which Iran has nuclear capabilities, Israel must maintain its policy of ambiguity. The essay first deals with the issue of explicit nuclear deterrence, and then discusses whether the advantages of ambiguity will remain valid "the day after." It discusses the possibility of regional stability between Israel and Iran solely in terms of the policy of nuclear ambiguity, and thus the possibility of nuclear stability by means of arms control, no first use, or other agreements is not discussed here explicitly, though it may be mentioned in various contexts.

## The Debate over Nuclear Ambiguity

Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity dates back to the 1960s. While the nature of this policy, as well as how it came into being, is in dispute,[1] it was encapsulated by the pronouncement that Israel would "not be the first to introduce [nuclear weapons] into the region."[2] Later, Yigal Allon, one of the leading figures opposed to a policy of basing deterrence on nuclear potential declared that "Israel would also not be the second" to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East.[3] Allon's declaration may be

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parsed in two ways. One reading is Israel must be very close to acquiring open nuclear capabilities and therefore, should an Arab nation arm itself with such weapons, Israel will not be left behind. (Over the years, there were those who interpreted Allon's declaration to mean that Israel was keeping a "bomb in the basement," i.e., Israel had the technological knowledge to make a nuclear weapon but lacked the option of using it in the immediate term.) An alternative reading is that Israel would not allow any nation in the Middle East to arm itself with nuclear weapons. In other words, this was the source of the so-called Begin doctrine.[4]

These interpretations are not mutually exclusive, as "Allon viewed the nuclearization of the conflict as a disaster of the highest order and spoke of the idea that if a danger of a third national destruction existed [in addition to the destruction of the First Temple and exile to Babylonia in 586 BCE and the destruction of the Second Temple and exile in 70 CE], it existed only from this direction, from the introduction of nuclear weapons."[5]

Despite the intentional fog surrounding the political discussion of the issue, over the years opposing viewpoints have emerged in Israeli political circles about the advantages and drawbacks of the policy of nuclear ambiguity. For the most part, the debate has been conducted as an academic discussion in the media. Although ambiguity has been problematic for some Israeli political figures, the policy has nonetheless held and continues steadfast with no alterations. In fact, despite the public and political pressure (especially but not only from Arab political parties) to discuss the issue, over the past fifty years there has been a consensus of keeping the policy of ambiguity in place.[6]

The policy of ambiguity is a diplomatic fiction: a fiction because the decision makers of the world believe that Israel has nuclear capabilities; and diplomatic because it carries substantial weight on the international diplomatic field (in terms of international agreements, committees, peace talks, and so one). Nonetheless, the ambiguity is a significant element in Israel's deterrence, and Ze'ev Schiff rightly noted that the policy of ambiguity should be eligible for the Israel Security Prize.[7]

## Nuclear Hawks
Analysts and researchers who oppose the policy of ambiguity have for many years recommended revoking it and instead adopting a policy

of explicit nuclear deterrence. Some propose Israel do this in order to strengthen its national security.[8] Others combine moral revulsion from nuclear weapons with democratic formalism (e.g., the project is not under open supervision; the manner in which decisions are made is not transparent). There is a certain paradox here, as most of those in the latter category, who are interested in Israel divesting itself of nuclear arms, are willing to have the region enter the nuclear era as a preliminary step. In other words, they claim that the Middle East must go through a period of explicit nuclear deterrence before it enters the era of disarmament.[9]

Nuclear hawks raise a number of considerations in favor of explicit nuclear deterrence:

a.  Despite the policy of nuclear ambiguity, Israel is presumed to be a nuclear power. Since for all intents and purposes the region already sees Israel as a nuclear state, a strategy of explicit deterrence would not lead to any change in Israel's image in the Middle East.

b.  Explicit nuclear deterrence would lead to a strengthening of Israeli internal morale and decrease anxiety about conventional attacks by Arab nations.

c.  The policy of ambiguity has not prevented the introduction of nuclear weapons into the Middle East, as evidenced by the Iraqi, Libyan, Syrian, and Iranian nuclear projects.

d.  Explicit deterrence would help reduce the defense budget currently funneled to strengthening and maintaining conventional forces.

e.  Consequently, Israel's dependence on American weapons and funding would be reduced.

f.  Explicit nuclear deterrence would make the processes connected to the nuclear issue (bureaucratic, economic, military, and others) more transparent and therefore more democratic.

Those who are adamantly in favor of explicit nuclear deterrence tend to accept the possibility of nuclear stability with regard to Iran, and even more, seem ready to come to terms with the Iranian nuclear project. Some prefer outright the creation of a nuclear balance over what they see as the uncertainty of the current situation. In addition to academicians who support this approach, Uzi Arad − while in a political capacity − said (in response to a question on a future theoretical situation) that "the situation of mutual armament [between Israel and Iran] is safer than a situation of mutual peace." According to Arad, "the defensive power we

have must become more sophisticated, be very powerful, and result in no one daring to realize any capability of harming us. Should they dare, we will exact from them full payment so that they too will not survive." Arad noted explicitly that a state of regional cold war is preferable to mutual peace between Israel and Iran, a state of affairs that can easily collapse.[10] Arad's preference for mutual armament (over unsure security of the region) ultimately means (after or maybe before the nuclearization of Iran) the elimination of Israel's nuclear ambiguity.

Academics and publicists lead the supporters of explicit nuclear deterrence, and most decision makers today avoid public discussion of the subject. Interestingly, however, in late 2001 there were media reports of a disagreement between Binyamin Netanyahu and then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Netanyahu reportedly claimed that "the veil of secrecy surrounding Israel's nuclear capabilities must be canceled, if it turns out that Iran is approaching nuclear capability."[11]

The question whether the international system (i.e., the United States) can contain and deter a nuclear Iran has been discussed extensively by analysts. Current research tends to support the possibility of stability between the US and a nuclear Iran.[12] The issue of regional deterrence balances has been debated less, usually bypassing the issue of Israel's policy of ambiguity. As an extension of their longstanding philosophy, nuclear hawks support a termination of the policy of ambiguity should Iran go nuclear.

In Israel, especially in the popular media, Reuven Pedatzur and Louis René Beres, the head of Project Daniel,[13] have long since claimed that the answer to Iran's nuclearization must be "to bring the bomb out of the basement"[14] (Beres), because "it is possible to live with [a nuclear] Iran"[15] (Pedatzur). Avner Cohen and Marvin Miller have said that the time has come "to take the Israeli nuclear bomb out of the basement," though their arguments focus less on the realm of strategy and more on concern for the state of Israel's democracy.[16]

Bruce Riedel, a former advisor to President Obama, has written and spoken about Israel's right to strengthen its nuclear deterrence by combining Israeli nuclear capabilities with America's. In practice, Riedel has suggested a joint American-Israeli nuclear umbrella. Riedel notes: "If we want truly to be serious about making a deal with Iran over the nuclear issue, Israel must come out of the closet. A policy that is based

on deceptions and double standards must, sooner or later, fail."[17] If five years ago it was possible to read about "a handful of experts who don't dare identify themselves" speaking of a nuclear Iran leading to regional stability, today this is a far more prevalent point of view.[18]

## Nuclear Doves

Israel's nuclear policy rests on two foundations: intentional ambiguity, and Allon's declaration that "Israel would also not be the second" to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East. In other words, Israel is the gatekeeper to the introduction of nuclear weapons into the Middle East. It is neither a member of the nuclear club, nor will it allow any other nation to become a member. The 1981 attack on the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq and the 2007 bombing of the Syrian reactor (according to foreign sources) are direct derivatives of Israel's nuclear policy.[19] And even though as gatekeeper Israel has on a number of occasions failed to curb various nuclear initiatives in the region, in the end Israel has successfully prevented its regional neighbors (except for Libya, which subsequently rolled back its program) from possessing nuclear weapons. Almost half a century of the policy of ambiguity has proven its internal logic: the Middle East has not become nuclear, notwithstanding several attempts and significant international pressures to do so.

Given that to date there is no declared nuclear nation in the Middle East, nuclear doves have raised a number of claims in favor of maintaining the policy of ambiguity:

a. The policy of ambiguity gives Israel a unique status in the international arena, and as long as there is no clear evidence of nuclear capabilities (e.g., nuclear testing), Israel is not a nuclear state (a non-status that itself has many implications). Changing the policy would harm US and international efforts to limit the proliferation of nuclear arms and thereby damage the greater fabric of relations between Israel and the US.

b. As long as Israel maintains its policy of ambiguity, it can position itself as opposed to a Middle East arms race. The moment Israel concedes its nuclear ambiguity, it opens the door to a regional nuclear arms race and adds its seal of approval to such a race.

c. In a situation in which various Middle East nations are considering (or actively pursuing) arming themselves with nuclear weapons, the

policy of ambiguity strengthens Israel's ability to take both military and diplomatic action against them. A policy of explicit nuclear deterrence would weaken international legitimacy for Israeli military action against states that acquire nuclear capabilities.

d. The policy of nuclear ambiguity managed to weaken motivation for the nuclearization of the Middle East and allowed decision makers in the region to overcome internal public and political pressures and avoid traveling the military nuclear route. Thus, Israel's nuclear policy has bolstered those in the internal Arab debate opposing nuclear armament. Conversely, explicit nuclear deterrence would strengthen those supporting independent development of nuclear weapons.

e. Nuclear deterrence has in any case not prevented conventional wars in the past, nor has it stopped terrorism. Therefore, explicit deterrence is not an alternative to Israel's maintaining its conventional superiority. In the case of a limited attack, Israel will need its conventional capabilities. In addition, if there is another nation in the Middle East with nuclear capabilities, the policy of explicit nuclear deterrence is liable to weaken Israel's conventional capability as a result of concern about nuclear escalation. Not only is there no certainty that explicit deterrence in the reality of the Middle East would prevent the occurrence of a conventional war; in fact, nuclear deterrence in the Middle East is liable to lead to the opposite result of what proponents of nuclear openness believe: it is liable to perpetuate conflicts by neutralizing the possibility for arriving at a conventional decision.

f. Even in the case of explicit deterrence, Israel would need foreign aid and American support because it would still have to maintain conventional superiority. In fact, in a situation of explicit deterrence and regional nuclear balances, Israel is liable to face increased costs in its nuclear program. The proof of strong explicit nuclear deterrence lies in financial investments in the nuclear project and the related weaponry that strengthen nuclear deterrence over time, because the development and maintenance of nuclear technology and the development of means of nuclear deterrence are offset by the development of conventional weapons (or resource-intensive technological projects).

## The Iranian-Israel Case: The Possibility of Nuclear Balance

The policy of nuclear ambiguity has proven itself over the last fifty years. Does it also meet the case of a nuclear Iran? Are the drawbacks of explicit nuclear deterrence on Israel's part cancelled out by a nuclear Iran?

There are a number of possible main scenarios regarding Iranian nuclearization. One, Iran adopts explicit nuclear deterrence: Iran will have a limited number of nuclear bombs within a few years as well as a warhead for launching nuclear weapons. Two, Iran maintains a policy of ambiguity with regard to every aspect of its nuclear project, similar to Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity. Three, Iran becomes a nuclear threshold state: Iran does not cross the nuclear threshold and reserves for itself the "option to break out." In other words, it has no nuclear weapon ready to use, but has all the equipment and technological know-how required to put one together.[20] Four, Iran manufactures a bomb for testing and discovers that it has not mastered the means for operating tactical nuclear weapons. Of course, each of these scenarios may be more complex or contain a number of possibilities.

Based on these potential Iranian scenarios, there are four main options from the perspective of Israel's nuclear policy. One, Israel maintains its policy of ambiguity: Israel continues to maintain a policy of ambiguity with regard to every aspect of its nuclear capabilities and policy. Two, Israel adopts a policy of full nuclear deterrence: Israel displays its nuclear capabilities and announces its nuclear defense doctrine. Three, Israel announces that is has nuclear capabilities and goes into no further detail. Four, Israel does not change its nuclear policy but pushes for regional agreements on arms control and general disarmament of the Middle East of weapons of mass destruction.

The notable drawback of the last option is the lack of faith that many in the Israeli political echelon have in international agreements, along with the undeclared policy that nuclear disarmament will only come after a number of years of general peace in the Middle East. Israel would claim, with a great deal of justification, that Iran has not honored its signature to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and therefore Israel cannot rely on international committees or regional agreements. Similarly, for arms control treaties to be honored, Iran would be obligated to reveal its nuclear capabilities (and other Middle East nations would have to reveal their non-conventional capabilities). It is hard to imagine a situation in which

Iran would be a credible partner to a process of arms control agreements after its flagrant violations of international treaties and after its many years of clashes with the West over the nuclear issue. The establishment of an arms control treaty requires a period of time in which Israel would be in a state of ongoing uncertainty, and it is easy to imagine that internal pressures by political (and public) elements would be leveled on decision makers to adopt explicit nuclear deterrence at such a time.[21]

The drawback of an announcement (the third option) lies in the fact that it goes a long way toward Israel declaring its nuclear capabilities. While there is no revelation of Israel's actual nuclear capabilities, it does represent a significant catalyst for the nuclearization of other nations in the Middle East. On the other hand, one could claim that the lack of clarity about Israel's capabilities and its doctrine of use of force would weaken the possibility of constructing regional arms control agreements and would therefore promote instability.

The second option, whereby Israel adopts full nuclear deterrence, contains all the drawbacks described above with regard to explicit nuclear deterrence. The only advantage to explicit deterrence, from the perspective of a strategic advantage in the nuclear era, is the possibility of creating a nuclear balance between Israel and Iran. However, there is good reason to question whether such a balance is possible. The word "balance" implies a scale: equal forces or equilibrium. This is problematic in the attempt to describe the situation that would be created between Israel and Iran. The question that needs to be asked, from the point of view of the policy of ambiguity, is not whether it is possible to arrive at a balance vis-à-vis Iran (and thereby prevent a nuclear war). Rather, what would be the nature and meaning of such a balance? Even if we assume that it is possible to arrive at a balance of regional nuclear deterrence that would reduce the risk of a nuclear war, it is important to ask what the effect of such a balance would be on the Middle East. In other words: would it be stable beyond the nuclear realm?

To the general risks of explicit nuclear deterrence enumerated in the theoretical analysis above, certain drawbacks and possible results of a policy of explicit nuclear deterrence specifically with regard to Iran should also be mentioned. First, a nuclear balance between Israel and Iran, unlike the nuclear balance during the Cold War, is an imbalanced, asymmetrical equilibrium. Because of the geographical proportions,

which favor Iran, and the disproportional nuclear capabilities which presumably favor Israel (as Iran would have a limited arsenal of nuclear weapons), Israel would always remain in a constant state of anxiety about an Iranian nuclear first strike. Thus, the security dilemma Israel would face would lead to a "launch on warning" situation, i.e., a nation worried that it could not withstand a first strike (because of civilian reasons and/or its nuclear response capabilities) is maneuvered into acting first if it is greatly worried about being attacked. Similarly, because Israel cannot allow itself to absorb a nuclear weapons attack (primarily because of civilian considerations), it lacks, strategically, the ability to trade geographical space for time, in other words, to sustain a nuclear strike and respond with a nuclear second strike.

Second, Israeli nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis Iran would weaken Israel's conventional advantage and is liable to neutralize conventional decision capabilities because of the concern that widespread military activity might lead to nuclear escalation (by Iran or a third party, such as Hizbollah). Because nuclear weapons are ineffective against terrorist organizations and sub-state organizations, explicit nuclear deterrence is liable to create a situation of low intensity border confrontations that would force controlled wars of attrition on the region to preserve the status quo. In fact, explicit nuclear deterrence is liable to sever the various levels of Israeli deterrence from one another.

Third, the Iranian nuclear program is not meant just to deter Israel, but it also functions as a tool for imposing Iranian hegemony and stagnation on the Middle East. The director-general of al-Arabiyya, Abd al-Rahman al-Rashid, wrote:

> We are not afraid of an Iranian nuclear bomb as a weapon. No military use will be made of this weapon; rather, it will serve as a means to change the rules of the game. We are afraid of Iran's policy, which uses all means in order to impose its existence [as a regional power], and the nuclear bomb is only a means to that end...We are not afraid of a nuclear bomb in Iranian hands. We are afraid of the rationale of the present regime in Tehran that has wasted its country's money on Hizbollah, Hamas, the extremist movements in Bahrain, Iraq, Yemen, and the Muslim Brotherhood, and has supported every extremist in the region. The ambition of Ahmadinejad is for expansion, hegemony, and clear control of the area; to achieve this, Iran needs a nucle-

ar umbrella that would defend it against the deterrence of [any other] power. The Gulf states, having built cities and tremendous industries on the banks of the Gulf will become – once Iran has nuclear weapons – hostage to the caprices of Ahmadinejad and his extremist government.[22]

Explicit nuclear deterrence on Israel's part would enhance the threat Rashid describes. Led by Egypt, the Arab nations are calling for disarming the Middle East of weapons of mass destruction, not for Israel to alter its policy of nuclear ambiguity and joining the nuclear club. The future of the Middle East as a whole depends on the difference. The claim that were Israel to heed the Egyptian call for disarmament by canceling its strategy of ambiguity it would appease both the US and Egypt and strengthen its own place in the international arena is without any foundation whatsoever. Not only are those nations not calling for Israel to withdraw its strategy of ambiguity, but ceding this strategy would serve the opponents of disarming the Middle East. Explicit deterrence in the face of a nuclear Iran would not be directed against Iran alone but also against other players in the region.

Finally, Iran would acquire major argumentative ammunition should Israel withdraw its policy of ambiguity. Iran will have legitimate claims about the international community applying a double standard and would have greater legitimacy in demanding that the economic sanctions in place against it be lifted.

## A Nuclear Iran without Explicit Nuclear Deterrence

The present discussion contends that abrogating the ambiguity policy would almost certainly create a "balance" lacking true equilibrium.[23] Louis René Beres has described this well in talking about the benefits of adopting explicit nuclear deterrence: such a step would perhaps be insufficient in saving Israel from a possible nuclear war with Iran, but would without a doubt be preferable to clinging to a policy that is no longer practical – that of ongoing uncertainty. However, beyond the claims made by Beres, it is not at all clear what kind of stability would be created by explicit Israeli nuclear deterrence. The dynamics of using nuclear weapons in the region would be fundamentally different from the dynamics of deterrence patterns between the US and the USSR, India and China, and India and Pakistan. In the absence of size of significant scale in the region (the size ratio between Iran or Egypt and Israel, for

example) and absent relevant sources and technology in this limited region, the dynamics that would be created by the nuclearization of the Middle East would lead to and strengthen the motivation to attempt preliminary decision. Such a decision, with its risks and outcomes, could be fatal.

In the nightmare scenario of a nuclear Iran, relying on the American nuclear umbrella is preferable to abrogating the policy of ambiguity, despite the concern stemming from the extent of America's commitment to Israel. Even in the face of a nuclear Iran, national security and Israeli deterrence would thus not be damaged; given the policy of ambiguity, hypotheses about Israel's real might would remain as before.

The proof of ambiguity's success over the past fifty years lies in the history of the region: it has weakened the motivation of Arab nations to arm themselves with nuclear weapons, and the nuclear aspect has been marginal throughout Israel's conflicts with its neighbors. Even in the face of a nuclear Iran it does not seem that revoking the policy would benefit Israel in any way.

One additional point concerns Israel's current political and economic situation. What is the meaning of deterrence without the willingness to realize the potential? The deterrent effect of nuclear potential proves itself only if there is willingness and capability to realize it. Such willingness is not specific but is proven over time, and therein lies its perpetual danger. From Israel's perspective, explicit nuclear deterrence – should it be realized – requires that the state arm itself unceasingly and create the reality of a regional cold war. The history of the Cold War demonstrated that two superpowers armed themselves with tremendous numbers of nuclear bombs, way beyond anything that was required as operational firepower, simply in order to maintain a nuclear balance between them so that neither side would be at a disadvantage.[24] One may assume that with or without regional treaties, explicit nuclear deterrence would boost Israel's motivation to arm itself with nuclear weapons far beyond what is strictly necessary in order to maintain its nuclear superiority (relative to its geographical inferiority). However, a nuclear balance between the various players would not prevent the continuation of the nuclear race, but would ensure that the nations of the region develop and arm themselves with nuclear weapons at the expense of their national economies in order to maintain nuclear deterrence.

## Notes

1   For a detailed discussion, see Yair Evron, *Israel's Nuclear Dilemma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

2   Some of the relevant literature on the topic is mentioned in the essay and the endnotes. While some analysts view the policy of ambiguity as a significant success, others have challenged this view. Eyal Zisser has claimed that ambiguity was the result of "improvisation with no prior planning or thought"; see "Goodbye to Opacity," *Walla.co.il*, April 12, 2010. Reuven Pedatzur argues that the strategy of nuclear opacity is "a ludicrous fiction." See "An End to Nuclear Opacity," *Haaretz*, May 7, 2010, and "Israel must Change its Nuclear Policy," *Haaretz*, October, 10, 2011.

3   On Allon's policy, see Yair Evron, "Yigal Allon and the Nuclear Issue," pp. 295-304, in *Preparing for the Future: The Values of Yigal Allon*, ed. Muki Tzur, Yigal Wagner, and Adam Raz (Genossar: Yigal Allon House Press, 2009).

4   Dana Preisler, "Israel's Policy of Nuclear Deterrence," MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2004.

5   Quoted in Yigal Wagner, "Politics and Ideology in the Debate over the Greater Land of Israel," in *The State of Israel and the Land of Israel*, ed. Adam Doron (Beit Berl Press, 1988), p. 175.

6   Over a number of years Moshe Dayan openly favored explicit nuclear deterrence and was publicly associated with the issue. Contemporary proponents include figures such as Yossi Sarid and Zehava Galon. The latter noted with particular vehemence that "everyone knows that Israel possesses nuclear weapons and that it ought to be stated openly and that we should put an end to the policy of opacity." Galon made this statement in a radio interview just before Ehud Olmert left for Germany for talks on armaments and security, *News 1* website, December 12, 2006.

7   Uzi Arad, ed., "The Balance of National Morale and Security," 2001 Herzliya Conference (Yediot Ahronot Press, 2001), p. 246.

8   See Shai Feldman, *Israeli Nuclear Deterrence*: *A Strategy for the 1980s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Shlomo Aronson, *Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East*, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Academon Press, 1994). Over the years, Feldman has changed his position about nuclear deterrence. See, e.g., "Maintaining Ambiguity," *Haaretz*, September 20, 1998.

9   A prominent proponent of this school of thought is Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). See also Meir Pa'il and Menahem Barabash, "The Nuclear Terror," *Haaretz*, January 1, 1998, and Avner Cohen and Marvin Miller, "Bringing Israel's Bomb Out of the Basement," *Foreign Affairs*, Sept./Oct. 2010.

10  "Power of Deterrence," *Haaretz*, July 10, 2009.

11  "Nuclear Duel between Netanyahu and Sharon," *Yediot Ahronot*, September 7, 2001.

12  Geoffrey Kemp of the Nixon Center has claimed, "The United States will have to learn to live with a nuclear Iran and shape a policy of deterrence that will be effective enough against the potential risks associated with an Iranian bomb." Kemp claims that the United States should learn to work with a nuclear Iran for the sake of the security of all the players connected to the Iranian issue. See Geoffrey Kemp, *U.S. and Iran, The Nuclear Dilemmas: Next Steps* (Washington: Nixon Center, April 2004). Kenneth Pollack and Ray Takeyh are also of the opinion that the US can contain a nuclear Iran. See Kenneth Pollack and Ray Takeyh, "Taking on Tehran," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2005. In an essay with James Lindsey, "After Iran Gets the Bomb," Takeyh claimed that a nuclear Iran could actually contribute to the region's stability, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2010. George Perkovich of the Carnegie Institute claims that should Iran acquire nuclear capabilities, the West will have to take one of the following two courses of action: either demand that Iran roll back its nuclear project to the stage at which it can be considered not to be a nuclear nation, or "adopt the new Iranian status and seek a modus vivendi through deterrence, containment and diplomacy." See Henry D. Sokolski and Patrick Clawson, *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), chapter 8. Sokolski and Clawson also claim that a nuclear Iran is far from being an insoluble problem for the West and that even the "worst-case scenario" can be resolved.

13  Project Daniel, established in the early years of the previous decade, was an independent research group comprising a group of security and strategy experts who studied different aspects of Israel's security. The project focused on the threat to Israel from non-conventional weapons and Israel's preparedness in face of these threats. The project's first report was submitted to Prime Minister Sharon in 2003 and publicized one year later. Regarding Israel's nuclear deterrence, Project Chair Louis René Beres wrote in an article summarizing the project that Israel ought to take the bomb out from the basement immediately, since otherwise Israel would be unable to take advantage of the recommended doctrine of preemption. See "Five-Year Retrospective on Project Daniel," *Nativ* 21 (2008): 90-99. In other words, if Iran acquires nuclear capability, Israel ought to revoke its ambiguity policy.

14  "Reconsidering Israel's Nuclear Ambiguity," *Haaretz*, March 6, 2009. Another essay by Beres, together with John Chain, continues the same line of thought: "Deterrent and Defense against a Nuclear Iran," *Haaretz*, June 24, 2001.

15  "It's Possible to Live with Iran," *Haaretz*, February 18, 2009.

16  Cohen and Miller, "Bringing Israel's Bomb Out of the Basement."

17  Bruce Riedel, "If Israel Attacks," *The National Interest*, Sept.-Oct. 2010.

18  "Kissinger is Worried," *Haaretz*, July 1, 2005.

19  Apart from destroying the nuclear reactor in East Syria, the bombing – which did not lead to any public comment by the Syrian leadership – was also intended to "signal" Iran, i.e., signal to the Iranian leadership that Israel

will not tolerate its nuclearization and will respond with military force if necessary.

20 Minister of Strategic Affairs Moshe Yaalon referred to the issue in his speech "Iran as a Nuclear Threshold Nation: Global, Regional and Israeli Implications," Herzliya Conference, February 2010. See www.herzliyaconference.org/_Uploads/3123bugi1.doc.

21 For Israeli public opinion on a number of questions relating to a nuclear Iran, see Yehuda Ben Meir and Olena Bagno-Moldavsky, *Vox Populi: Trends in Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2004-2009*, Memorandum No. 106 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2010).

22 MEMRI, February 24, 2010. Published by *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 21, 2010.

23 For a discussion with diametrically opposed conclusions from those of the present essay, see *The Iranian Bomb and Israel's Policy* (Netanya Academic College, The Center for Strategic Dialogue, 2005), especially pp. 18-22. In an epilogue Reuven Pedatzur refers to the debate among several experts and explains the necessity for a change in Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity. According to Pedatzur, the policy of ambiguity leaves too many "gray areas" that endanger the security of the State of Israel. In addition, Israel and Iran can adopt the model of inter-bloc balance: "Such deterrence must include unambiguous clarifications about the red lines that, if crossed, would place the Iranians in danger of an Israeli nuclear reprisal. Thus it would, for example, be made clear that identifying any missile launched by Iran in a westerly direction would, from Israel's perspective, mean that an Iranian missile had been launched at Israel. In such a case, Israel would not wait to see where the missile was going to strike or whether or not it was equipped with a nuclear warhead, and no attempt to intercept it would be made. Rather, automatically, an Israeli response would be triggered, which would include the nuclear attack on central targets in Iran, such as Tehran, Tabriz, Qom, Esfahan, and similar targets. Such a clarification would present Iran with the need to decide whether attacking and killing several thousand Israeli civilians would be worth the price of destroying the modern Iranian state, taking it back to the Middle Ages, and killing millions of Iranian civilians. It is doubtful whether there exists an Iranian national interest that could justify a price that high, including the possibility of killing the citizens of 'the little Satan.'"

24 Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, explained that massive nuclear arming – some described it as "unbridled" – was actually one of the moderating elements of the Cold War, because the certainty of total destruction made a nuclear war impossible. See Robert McNamara, *The Essence of Security* (Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), pp. 51-68.