

The Israeli Role in the Middle East Nuclear Blackmail

The emergence of 'Israel' as the first, and to date the only, Middle East state to possess nuclear weaponry is the logical extension of Zionism's drive for unchallenged regional supremacy. As we pointed out in the first installment of this study (*Democratic Palestine* no. 24), this drive for power has led to five major Arab-Zionist wars. Today it threatens the people of the area with a potential nuclear holocaust.

On October 5, 1986, the London *Sunday Times* broke the story that 'Israel' is the world's sixth-ranking nuclear power, confirming what has long been assumed by experts. Mordechai Vanunu, the Israeli nuclear technician who was fired and then defected after working nine years at a secret nuclear plant at Dimona, gave information indicating that 'Israel' had built 100-200 nuclear weapons over the past twenty years. These range from high-efficiency, light warheads to the components of thermonuclear (hydrogen) bombs able to destroy whole cities. His revelations also indicated that the Israeli arsenal contains weapons more destructive than those used in World War II.

INTRODUCING THE BOMB INTO THE MIDDLE EAST

Though the Zionist state injected itself into a nuclear-free area, it began efforts to acquire the bomb within a year of its foundation. Mineral surveys were conducted, revealing the presence of phosphates with uranium in the Negev (Naqab-South Palestine). Along with their robbery of Palestinian land, the Zionists plundered this resource as well, as a military asset in the quest for regional supremacy. Young Israeli scientists were sent abroad for training in the nuclear field, notably to the US and France. By 1949, the Weizmann Institute near Tel Aviv had set up a department for isotope research, where the US subsequently funded nuclear research. These early efforts were conducted exclusively under the auspices of the Defense Ministry and kept top secret, indicating that nuclear power for military purposes was the aim from the start. Due to the particular structure of the Zionist state, with almost total overlap of political and military functions and power, David Ben-Gurion was both defense and prime minister in the early years. This fact assisted in keeping the essence of the Israeli nuclear program secret. Even after Ben-Gurion's time, a very small group of officials have traditionally been responsible for decisions in such strategic fields.

The Israeli Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC) was founded in 1952, and the Zionist state embarked on a double-track course: ostensibly developing atomic power for peaceful purposes, and in the process acquiring the materials and know-how to make nuclear weapons. The latter occurred via secret cooperation with imperialist powers, and later fellow pariah states like South Africa and Taiwan, augmented by scientific espionage, including outright theft and fraud - acts deemed permissible when the culprit is 'Israel'. France and the US have been the main benefactors of the Israeli nuclear program, in accordance with their interests in having 'Israel' as an instrument for imposing imperialist policy in a strategic region.

Israeli secrecy around the nuclear program has always been a convenience for the imperialist states. They can support the Israeli military build-up, including its nuclear aspect, and reap the benefits of Israeli aggression on the Arab liberation movement, yet still publicly distance themselves from illegal Israeli acts. Professor Francis Perrin, France's high commissioner for atomic energy (1951-1970), substantiated this point in an interview with the *Sunday Times* (October 12, 1986): «We considered we could give the secrets... connected with work on nuclear weapons... to Israel, provided they kept it a secret themselves.»

The Zionist leadership has understood full well how to operate within the leeway provided by imperialist hypocrisy. In this context, one can note an entry in the diary of Yitzhak Rabin, today Israeli Defense Minister, from the time when he was ambassador to Washington (1968-73): «Some sources inform me that our military operations are the most encouraging breath of fresh air the American administration has enjoyed recently... There is a growing likelihood that the US would be interested in an escalation of our military activity with the aim of undermining Nasser's standing... Thus the willingness to supply us with additional arms depends more on stepping up our military activities against Egypt than on reducing it.»

The fact that imperialist support for conventional aggression could be transposed into a green light for the development of nuclear weaponry was not lost on the Zionist leadership. After all, the Dimona plant, the single most important advance in the Israeli nuclear program, was supplied by France in 1957, in effect a reward for Israeli services in the 1956 tripartite attack on Egypt. Moreover, in its attempts to be imperialism's major partner in the Middle East, 'Israel' was patterning itself after the US's global strategy and performance. In the years when the Zionist state was in the making, the US had used Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the testing ground for its own bombs. Although World War II was essentially won by the Allies, the US was sending a signal to the world that its leadership and conditions must be accepted. Meanwhile, destruction was wreaked on Japan so that it could be rebuilt in the US image, as a reliable ally in Asia. Israeli possession of nuclear weapons sends a similar ultimatum to the Arab people and states - submit or else.

SHIMON PERES— MR. NUCLEAR BOMB

In the early fifties, Ben-Gurion asked France for technical assistance in the nuclear field. In 1957, France agreed to supply a nuclear reactor and plant eventually capable of producing 40 kilograms of weaponry-grade uranium a year - enough for up