

An End to Ambiguity: US Counter-Proliferation from Tel Aviv to Tehran

Iran's Nuclear Program

In 2002 Iran announced plans to build six nuclear power stations. As a signatory of the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran can buy and operate centrifuges and other equipment needed for enriching uranium as long as it only uses the devices for nuclear power. NPT rules require that inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) be allowed into Iranian labs for verification purposes. Although the IAEA indicated on September 13, 2004 that officials were being allowed access to Iranian nuclear facilities, aspects of Iran's uranium enrichment efforts remain unclear.

Particles of weapons grade enriched uranium were detected in Iran during IAEA inspections. Iran claimed contamination was present on imported equipment. According to Jane's Defence Weekly, IAEA inspectors reached a tentative conclusion that equipment smuggled through the network headed by Pakistani scientist AQ Khan arrived in Iran contaminated from previous enrichment. Other analysts believe the traces are damning evidence of a clandestine Iranian nuclear weapons program.

Whether or not Iran is currently pursuing nuclear weapons, American interests are best served if all nuclear proliferation in the Middle East is reversed. Unfortunately, recent US policies have only created conditions in which nuclear weapon acquisition is seen as a means of survival for countries on the neoconservative policy "target list".

From the Iranian perspective, Israel has not only successfully developed its own arsenal of nuclear weapons under a policy of "strategic ambiguity", it has also shaped US policy through American neoconservatives with ties to the Israeli Likud party. American citizens must demand an effective counter proliferation strategy toward Tehran that first eliminates the policy of "strategic ambiguity" operating in Tel Aviv and Washington.

Balancing Against the Nuclear Hegemon

In the Middle East, there is only one known nuclear power. Israel has successfully maintained a policy of “strategic ambiguity”, neither admitting nor denying possession of nuclear weapons. This has allowed Israel to skirt NPT and US trade sanctions such as the Symington Amendment. Though estimates of the Israeli arsenal vary widely, depending upon the source, strategic ambiguity has helped transform Israel into the region’s only nuclear power. (See Exhibit #1).

Exhibit 1: Estimates of the Israeli Nuclear Arsenal

(Source: USAF Counterproliferation Center, Air War College citations)

Year	Estimates from Various Sources
1967	13 bombs
1969	5-6 bombs of 19 Kilotons yield
1973	13 bombs. 20 nuclear missiles and development of a “suitcase bomb”
1974	3 nuclear capable artillery battalions each with 12 175mm tubes and total of 108 warheads. 10 bombs
1976	10-20 nuclear weapons
1980	200 bombs
1984	12-31 atomic bombs 31 plutonium bombs and 10 uranium bombs
1985	At least 100 nuclear bombs
1986	100-200 fission bombs and a number of fusion bombs
1991	50-60 to 200-300
1992	Greater than 200 bombs
1994	64-112 bombs @ 5 kg/warhead 70-80 weapons "A complete repertoire" (neutron bombs, nuclear mines, suitcase bombs, submarine borne)
1996	60-80 Plutonium weapons, maybe >100 assembles, ER variants, variable yields. Possibly 200-300. 50-90 plutonium weapons, could have well over 135. 50-100 Jericho I and 30-50 Jericho II missiles.
1997	Greater than 400 deliverable thermonuclear and nuclear weapons

Unfortunately, Israel’s acquisition of an arsenal of tactical and strategic weapons and ability to directly and indirectly create “facts on the ground” in the region is now both the model and primary motivation for other state actors.

According Adam Shapiro, Israel's status makes future regional rebalancing inevitable:

“In the same way that Israel is promoting itself as a regional hegemon, as a regional superpower, it is getting to the point where other countries will seek to ally against Israel.. And it should be noted that there is no alliance in the current formulation. Egypt, Jordan, if they are aligned with anyone, it is the United States. They are large recipients of American aid money and American military dollars. As such, they pose no threat whatsoever to Israel”

(November 26, 2003 IRmep [Capitol Hill forum](#))

However, Iran can legitimately assume that after Iraq, it is next in line on the Israeli (and therefore American) list of targets for military intervention. It need read no further than the US National Security Strategy and key neoconservative policy documents. (See Exhibit #2).

Exhibit 2 Policies Developed and Implemented by Neoconservative Ideologues

(Source: [IASPS](#), [PNAC](#), [NSC](#))

Year	Policy	Defining Policy Document	Neoconservative Ideologues
1996	Invade Iraq	A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm – Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies	Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser
2000	Iran as a “Threat to US Interests in the Gulf”, Necessity for maintaining “forward bases in the Region”	Rebuilding America’s Defenses – Project for the New American Century	William Kristol, Robert Kagan, John Bolton
2002	Freeze “nuclear club” membership, “preemptive attacks” against transgressors	The National Security Strategy – National Security Council	Paul Wolfowitz

Middle East Foreign Policy Analysis

The past eight years of American actions have taught regional observers, including Iran, three significant lessons:

1. *Opaque nuclear capability development and ambiguity can allow a small power to suddenly and securely enter the nuclear club;*
2. *Nascent nuclear states such as North Korea can deter attack from even the United States with only limited numbers of nuclear weapons;*
3. *A little understood extension of “Strategic Ambiguity” into the US allows Israeli lobbies and ideologues to successfully direct US military policy in the Middle East against threats to Israeli interests while plausibly denying it and claiming Israeli’s enemies are, in fact, America’s own.*

From the Iranian government’s perspective, right wing Likud policies targeting Iran make achieving its own arsenal of tactical and strategic nuclear weapons as quickly as possible an urgent matter of survival. From an American standpoint, the US cannot engage or even credibly threaten Tehran with international isolation unless America first tackles “strategic ambiguity” in Tel Aviv and Washington. Lifting the rhetorical smoke of “strategic ambiguity” reveals the vast differences between US and Israeli policy objectives in the region. (See Exhibit #3).

Exhibit 3 State Regional Policy Objectives and Challenges

(Source: IRmep 2004)

Country	Policy Objectives	Impediments/Challengers
Iran	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain sovereignty, territorial contiguity. 2. Deter, repel, or respond to foreign aggressors. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. US military presence on two fronts. 2. Lack of tactical and strategic nuclear weapons.
Israel	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extend nuclear hegemony in the region 2. Maintain benefits of “strategic ambiguity” 3. Defeat perceived rivals without appearing to do so. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nuclear club entrants. 2. International scrutiny, growing international pressure. 3. Deteriorating “cover” for neoconservative policy implementation by the U.S.
United States	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Secure global access to petroleum and natural gas reserves. 2. Continuous petroleum and natural gas production. 3. Elimination of WMD and forces driving proliferation in the region. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Widespread conflict driven by religious extremism. 2. Terror attacks against energy production infrastructure 3. Inability to negotiate, form international coalitions or be perceived as an “honest broker” in the region.

America's first step toward diffusing regional proliferation is dispersing the fog of "strategic ambiguity." If Israeli nuclear weapons and regional policies are the major catalyst of demand for weapons of mass destruction by other regional actors, Israel's operatives in the United States are clearly the fixative. Recent allegations about sensitive, classified documents on US policy toward Iran making their way from Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith's office to AIPAC, and then on to Israel are only the most recent incident causing Americans to lose confidence that Israeli-linked officials are compromising American interests. To date, Perle, Feith, and Wolfowitz, among other neoconservatives, have operated under an inky cloud of "strategic ambiguity" from which they claim efforts on behalf of Israel are in fact truly for America.

It is now time for America to "clean house" of the entire lot of compromised neoconservative advisors in order to assure both the American people and international community that US actions in the region are a legitimate reflection of true American interests, rather extensions of Israeli policy. America can no longer function or exert influence in the region unless it regains status as an "honest broker". Future policy in the region, including potential military actions, will suffer growing skepticism from American citizens now becoming aware of the curious and unpalatable linkages key administration advisors have to Israel.

Recommendations: Defusing a Nuclear Middle East

America's principle interest is to defuse all Middle East nuclear proliferation. Even the most limited use of tactical or nuclear weapons in the petroleum rich Middle East by any party could throw the world into an unending economic depression. To avert nascent nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, the US must:

1. **Demand a Public Nuclear Audit from Tel Aviv** Unless Congress drops decades of complicity obscuring Israeli nuclear arms policy, it will never understand or constructively deal with the prime motivation for other regional states to acquire nuclear weapons. Congress must immediately recognize that Israel is a nuclear power and pressure it to join the NPT. An immediate IAEA audit of Israeli weapons and targeting data must commence.
2. **Regional Disarmament Treaty** US interests are best served by a fully denuclearized Middle East. Neither perceived friends nor enemies should be allowed to maintain or further develop nuclear weapons. Toward this end, the US should apply pressure on Israel to dismantle its nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction under multinational observation. Other states can be legitimately pressured or forced to halt development programs if a verifiable regional treaty that also oversees the removal of Israel's arsenal is in effect.
3. **Regional Policies must be "Made in the USA"** US advisors and policy makers lose credibility and effectiveness if they are perceived to function under Israeli influence. The administration should strive to purge "ambiguous" advisors and install competent appointees that can credibly represent U.S. interests under the following criteria:

- Appointees have not entered contractual, advisory, or other business relationships with governments of the region;
- Appointees have no compromising regional ideological or religious affiliations which cloud or influence their decision making;
- Appointees are competent, regionally knowledgeable and experienced in dealing with governments across the entire Middle East.

This may require that the administration pass over crowing legions of think tank pundits and lobbyists to once again reach for proven figures in business and academic circles. By returning to the traditional American custom of hiring advisors and appointees who agree to serve at some sacrifice to other interests, America can again harness the energy of motivated and uncompromised patriots. Improving the quality of American advisors and appointees is critical for confronting the true proliferation dynamics of the region. Ending “strategic ambiguity” and returning to the pursuit of American regional interests is the first step.

About the IRmep

The Institute for Research Middle Eastern Policy (IRmep) is an independent policy research “think tank” headquartered in Washington, D.C. Founded in 2002, the institute provides balanced, relevant, and actionable research and recommendations for U.S. policy in the Middle East. IRmep educates U.S. policymakers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the mass media.

IRmep's mission is to produce accurate, relevant, actionable research and recommendations to key policy makers identifying U.S. interests in the Middle East and the means for achieving them.

By leveraging a network of credible academics with domain expertise, IRmep policy research avoids damaging ideological bias and unproductive frameworks when analyzing the region.

IRmep's funding comes from a broad range of corporate, foundation, and individual donors that wish to see U.S. policy in the region become more responsive to the interests of all Americans.

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Institute for Research: Middle Eastern Policy

Tel: (202) 342-7325
Fax: (202) 318-8009
Email: info@IRmep.org
Web: <http://www.IRmep.org>
Mail: PO Box 32041
Washington, D.C. 20007

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