

# Book bares Israeli nuclear arms deals with apartheid regime

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25 May 2010

Israel negotiated with South Africa for the sale of nuclear-armed missiles to the apartheid regime in the 1970s, according to a book published today. The revelation has surfaced at an inconvenient time for Washington as it campaigns for increased sanctions against Iran over Tehran's own nuclear program.

The new book, "The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with apartheid South Africa," was written by Sasha Polakow-Suransky, the senior editor at *Foreign Affairs*, a publication oriented to the American foreign policy establishment. It has provided the first documentary evidence of Israel's nuclear weapons program. These documents also demonstrate that the Zionist state was prepared to sell these weapons to a pariah regime that had engaged in repeated military attacks on its neighbors, while oppressing and waging unceasing state violence against its own black majority population.

The British *Guardian* Monday published the documents declassified by the South African government at Polakow-Suransky's request during his research on the book.

They include a formal request from the apartheid regime for nuclear equipped missiles and minutes of meetings held in 1975 in which then Israeli defense minister (now Israeli president) Shimon Peres bargained with his South African counterpart, P.W. Botha, over the terms of such a sale.

These minutes, signed by Peres, include his statements indicating that Israel was prepared to sell Pretoria its Jericho missiles and warheads that came in "three sizes," meaning conventional, biological and nuclear.

The book states that South Africa wanted the nuclear missiles for possible strikes against neighboring African states—such as Angola and Mozambique—where

the apartheid regime had repeatedly intervened.

"South Africa's leaders yearned for a nuclear deterrent—which they believed would force the west to intervene on their behalf if Pretoria were ever seriously threatened—and the Israeli proposition put that goal within reach," Polakow-Suransky writes in the book.

The publication of the documents provoked a blustering protest from the Israeli president's office. It issued a statement saying that "there exists no basis in reality for the claims" published in the *Guardian* about the nuclear bargaining between the Zionist and apartheid regimes, despite the visible evidence to the contrary. It added that his office would send a "harsh letter" to the newspaper, demanding that it publish "the true facts."

Polakow-Suransky has indicated that Israel attempted unsuccessfully to pressure the current government of South Africa not to declassify the documents, which had been declared secret at the time by both Tel Aviv and Pretoria.

While the 1975 deal was not consummated, Israel continued to serve as the apartheid regime's principal arms dealer and intimately collaborated in nuclear arms programs, testing Jericho missiles in South Africa, providing nuclear weapons material and, apparently, conducting at least one joint test of a nuclear weapon in 1979 in the Indian Ocean, a flagrant violation of international treaties.

The Israeli government and its supporters have routinely branded anyone drawing attention to the obvious parallels between the conditions imposed upon Palestinians living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza and South Africa's apartheid system as anti-Semitic. But, as the book elaborates, the similarities between the two regimes were evident to Israeli officials themselves, who cited them in defending the

close ties between Tel Aviv and Pretoria.

Another document published in the book is a diplomatic message sent by Peres (a pivotal figure in both Israel's foreign as well as nuclear policy over the past half century) to Pretoria following a secret visit to the South African capital in 1974. Proposing an alliance between the two regimes, Peres wrote that "this relationship is based not only on common interests and on the determination to resist equally our enemies, but also on the unshakeable foundations of our common hatred of injustice and our refusal to submit to it."

What precisely was the "common hatred of injustice" that Israel shared with the white supremacist regime in South Africa, dominated as it was by avowed Nazi sympathizers (Prime Minister B.J. Vorster, welcomed to Jerusalem in 1976, had been jailed in World War II because of his support for Hitler)? Clearly it was shared hostility to the demands of the populations that they oppressed; the Palestinians on the one hand, and the black majority on the other.

Even more explicit are the statements of Israel's ambassador to South Africa, Likud Party supporter Eliahu Lankin. Polakow-Suransky cites a statement written by Lankin to Israel's South African allies in 1987, just three years before the opening of negotiations between the government and the African National Congress: "What the ANC is demanding today is nothing less than 'one man, one vote'... If the whites were to agree to this in present circumstances, they would be committing suicide, not only politically but physically as well."

Speaking to an audience at Tel Aviv University, the Israeli army's former chief of staff, Rafael Eitan, warned that South African blacks "want to gain control over the white majority just like the Arabs here want to gain control over us. And we, too, like the white minority in South Africa, must act to prevent them from taking us over."

Israel has long held to a policy known as nuclear "ambiguity," refusing to confirm or deny the existence of its nuclear weapons stockpile. It has also refused to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and rejected any international oversight of its Dimona reactor in the Negev desert.

In 1986, a technician at the Israeli nuclear plant, Mordechai Vanunu, leaked to the *Sunday Times* of London detailed information and photographs of secret

operations at Dimona, confirming that Israel had amassed a considerable nuclear arsenal. Vanunu was subsequently kidnapped by the Mossad secret police, tried in secret and sentenced to 18 years in prison, a decade of it served in solitary confinement.

As the documents from Polakow-Suransky were published, it was reported from Israel that Vanunu had been thrown back into prison on charges that he had violated the terms of his parole.

"Shame on you Israel ... for putting me in prison after 24 years of speaking the truth," Vanunu said after leaving the courthouse Sunday. "Shame on you all the world media ... for not protecting freedom of speech," he added.

The timing of the documents' publication could hardly have been worse as far as Washington is concerned, coming at the opening of a nuclear non-proliferation conference at the United Nations, which US officials had hoped to utilize as a forum for ratcheting up pressure on Iran. This has taken the form of Washington portraying Iran, which has no nuclear weapons and claims to be involved only in the development of nuclear power for peaceful purposes, as an imminent threat.

The new documentary evidence not only confirms the open secret that Israel—with Washington's protection—has amassed hundreds of nuclear weapons, but also was prepared to sell them to a criminal regime.

This only underscores the increasingly obvious fact that Washington's anti-Iranian campaign is driven not by some abstract interest in containing nuclear proliferation, but rather by US interests in dominating the vast energy resources of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia and eliminating a regional rival.



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