

The Link

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~~Dimona~~

(Shhh! It's a secret.)

By John F. Mahoney

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Israel is today's sixth, if not fifth, most powerful nuclear state, with 100-plus nuclear weapons, along with the ability to build atomic, neutron and hydrogen bombs. How did it happen?

Back in the late 1950s, France built a nuclear reactor for the Israelis at a site in the Negev desert called Dimona. Ostensibly intended for generating nuclear energy for domestic use, it was later revealed that its cooling circuits were built two to three times larger than necessary for the supposed 26-megawatt reactor, proof that, from the beginning, it was designed to be a plutonium extraction plant for nuclear weapon fuel. Francis Perrin, the high commissioner of the French Atomic Energy Agency from 1951 to 1970, later explained why France gave atomic secrets to the fledgling Jewish state: "We thought the Israeli bomb was aimed against the Americans, not to launch it against America but to say 'if you don't want to help us in a critical situation we will require you to help us, otherwise we will use our nuclear bombs'."¹

In 1959, Norway supplied the reactor with heavy water, essential for producing a chain reaction. In 1963, when the reactor started operating, the United States supplied four more tons of heavy water. What Israel needed now was uranium.

In 1965, 206 pounds of weapons grade uranium disappeared from the Nuclear Materials and Equipment Corporation (NUMEC) in Apollo, PA. Three years later, on Sept. 10, 1968, four Israelis, including Mossad agent Rafael Eitan, Israel's top spy on nuclear facilities in the U.S., visited the NUMEC plant. Soon thereafter, 587 pounds of highly enriched uranium went missing.

About This Issue

Its name comes from the biblical town, mentioned in Joshua 15:21-22, that was one of the Caananite cities said to be totally annihilated by the Israelites. Today's Dimona, the third largest city in the Negev, knows something about total annihilation—something even Joshua would have had a hard time imagining.

Page 15 lists several DVDs related to our feature article, including "Five Broken Cameras," the Oscar-nominated documentary filmed on the West Bank.

On page 14, we offer a special tribute to a very special supporter.

John Mahoney, Executive Director

In 1976, CIA Deputy Director Carl Duckett told senior Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) members that the CIA believed Israel had illegally obtained highly enriched uranium from the NUMEC plant and that Israel used this for its first nuclear bombs. The Duckett briefing was passed on to President Gerald Ford's assistant, James Conan, who informed the president: I have good news and bad news. The good news is that Israel definitely has the Bomb and can take care of itself. The bad news is that the stuff came from Pennsylvania.² How the "stuff" got from Apollo, PA to a site some 7,000 miles away in the Negev desert is a still unfolding story.

Enter NUMEC

By 1949, Zionist forces had taken 78 percent of Palestinian lands. David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, knew that the only way the Arabs could be convinced that their loss was irreversible was to confront them with an overwhelming military advantage. He was particularly fascinated with nuclear energy and the "tremendous power" hidden within the atom, observing, "What Einstein, Oppenheimer and Teller, the three of them are Jews, made for the United States, could also be done by scientists in Israel for their own people."³

By June 1952, the Israel Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC) was quietly established, and between the summer of 1956 and the fall of 1957 the Dimona plant was operational and the search was on for highly enriched uranium.

Victor Ostrovsky is a former case officer for the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service entrusted with plotting the course for Israel's leaders. In his 1990 book "By Way of Deception," he notes the curious fact that the Mossad employs far fewer staff operatives in its foreign offices than do the intelligence services of most other countries. Why? Because it has a unique resource that no other country has: it has the sayanim, or "the assistants." These are Jews, specifically "100 percent" Jews, who are not Israeli citizens, but who may have relatives living in Israel. The Mossad contacts the Israeli relative and asks for a letter that it can present to the relative, say an American citizen, attesting that the bearer's goal is to "help save Jewish people in the

diaspora," and that his or her help is needed. Ostrovsky says there are thousands of sayanim around the world, and he offers examples of how they are used by the Mossad: A car rental sayan can help the Mossad rent a car without having to complete the usual documentation; an apartment sayan can find accommodations without raising suspicions; a bank sayan can get you money if you need it in the middle of the night; a doctor sayan can treat a bullet wound without reporting it to the police. And if you wanted to procure highly enriched uranium, well, you would go to a nuclear power sayan.

Suspicion has long centered on Zalman Mordecai Shapiro, born May 12, 1920 in Canton Ohio, the son of Abraham and Minnie, née Pinck, Shapiro. His father was an orthodox rabbi from Lithuania who had lost relatives in the Holocaust. Zalman grew up strongly supportive of an independent Jewish state, and convinced that there was no difference between the interests of the United States and those of Israel.⁴ In August 1948, with a PhD in chemistry from John Hopkins University, he began his career in nuclear power at Westinghouse Electric Corporation in East Pittsburgh. He moved a year later to the Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory in the Pittsburgh suburb of West Mifflin. The sole focus of Bettis, a U.S. government-owned research and development facility operated by Bechtel, was the design and development of nuclear power for the U.S. Navy. At this time Zalman became active in, and eventually president of, the local branch of the Zionist Organization of America, which had worked to mobilize support of the U.S. government, Congress, and the American public for the creation of Israel in 1948.

In 1948, Westinghouse won a contract from the U.S. Navy to design and build the first pressurized water reactors to power nuclear submarines like the USS Nautilus, and Zalman was invited to be part of the reactor project. In 1956, the year after President Eisenhower directed the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) to provide "limited amounts of raw and fissionable materials" to "free world" nations, Shapiro incorporated NUMEC. Operations began in February 1957, and by 1968 the workforce had grown from 14 to 1,000, helped by government projects, including a \$2.5 million plutonium contract. (Workers said they were encouraged to stuff nylon

stockings and cigarettes in shipments sent to Israel, and Zalman ordered that all proceeds from the vending machines in the plant be donated to Israel.⁵)

Sometime in the early 1960s, the AEC became aware of unacceptable high levels of missing nuclear material at the NUMEC plant. Admiral Hyman Rickover, head of the Navy's nuclear ship program, castigated Shapiro for NUMEC's "apathy" toward security and the inherent risks of the company's ties to foreign countries. Following the Admiral's complaint, an Israeli metallurgist assigned to highly sensitive plutonium work was forced to resign from NUMEC.⁶

In 1965, a NUMEC employee said he saw people he could not identify loading cans about the size of highly enriched uranium-235 canisters onto a ship headed for Israel. The employee reported the incident in 1980 when he was interviewed by FBI agents.⁷

In September 1968, four Israeli intelligence agents visited NUMEC. In its request to AEC to approve the visitors, NUMEC identified them as Rafael Eitan "chemist, Ministry of Defense, Israel," Avraham Bendor, "Department of Electronics, Israel," Ephraim Biegun, "Department of Electronics, Israel," and Avraham Hermoni, "scientific counselor, Israeli Embassy, Washington." Ostensibly, they went there to discuss the purchase of small plutonium 238 power sources. But they were other than their titles suggested.

Rafael "Rafi" Eitan was a high-level Mossad agent who later directed the Israeli operation that recruited the U.S. Navy sayan Jonathan Pollard. Bendor's real name was Avraham Shalom, a longtime agent of Shin Bet, Israel's internal intelligence arm. Biegun was the head of the Mossad's Technical Department, and Hermoni was technical director of Israel's nuclear bomb project at RAFAEL, Israel's armament development authority, and he played an important role in the Dimona project.⁸ Speaking of Eitan's visit, Anthony Cordesman, a former Penta-

gon official and national security analyst concluded: "There is no conceivable reason for Eitan to have gone (to the Apollo plant) but for the nuclear material."⁹

The NUMEC processing plant in Apollo has long been the subject of a U.S. investigation into the alleged diversion of hundreds of pounds of enriched uranium to Israel. Code-named project "Divert," the documents show that the FBI, the CIA and the now-defunct Atomic Energy Commission spent years trying to discover what happened to the 760 pounds of uranium that went missing during the time that Zalman Shapiro headed NUMEC.

In 2009, U.S. Senator Arlen Specter, at the prompting of Zalman Shapiro's lawyer, asked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to clear Shapiro of any suspicion of diversion. The NRC refused, stating it did "not have information that would allow it to unequivocally conclude that nuclear material was not diverted from the site."¹⁰

Grant Smith, in his 2012 book "Divert," quotes CIA Tel Aviv Station Chief John Hadden as saying that NUMEC was an "Israeli operation from the beginning." Smith, an investigative journalist,

documents that claim in his book, showing how the men who came together in the late 50s as NUMEC's directors had but one common denominator: "their utter devotion to the advancement of Israel."¹¹

U.S. Army Colonel Walter Patrick "Pat" Lang, Jr. was given an advance copy of Smith's book. Lang, a former high-ranking member of the Senior Executive Service providing military intelligence analysis of the Middle East and South Asia for the Department of Defense, offered this appraisal of Smith's findings:

It seems clear that Shapiro was a committed Zionist from early in his life and someone for whom his American citizenship was a mere convenience.... It also seems clear that it was



Zalman Shapiro

the brainstorm of people in the Jewish Agency to create a company like this one for the specific purpose of establishing a “front” for the illegal export of refined nuclear materials in support of the weapons program. To that end they found Shapiro (or he found them) and the Israelis and he recruited other Jewish technologists, venture capitalists, and U.S. government officials—probably in the AEC and Justice Department—to make the whole thing hold together...

The continuing foot-dragging by elected and appointed officials in this matter is mute proof of the deep, deep, deep, penetration of the U.S. government by the Zionist apparatus. When I was in DIA, it was understood that to raise this issue was a career killer... The FBI’s investigative findings and the way they were thwarted in all their efforts is so reminiscent of many such affairs that I don’t find it odd at all. It is a long time since loyal Americans have been well-served by their federal government in the matter of Israel.¹²

The Trigger

It is one thing to have the components that go into a nuclear bomb, it’s another to have the device to set it off.

A krytron, pictured here, is a cold-cathode, gas-filled tube intended as a high-speed trigger for detonating nuclear weapons. For this reason, the export of krytrons is tightly regulated by the U.S. government. This, however, did not stop Israel’s Ministry of Defense from receiving 15 shipments totaling 800 krytrons between 1979 and 1983. How did it happen?

In late 1972, two men sat down for dinner at the Kasbah, an elite restaurant in northern Tel Aviv. One, Arnon Milchan, an Israeli in his early twenties, was a member of LAKAM, the superspy agency created by then-minister of defense Shimon Peres to secure, by any means necessary, the materials and equipment

needed for a nuclear weapon. The other, Dr. Richard (Dick) Kelly Smyth, an American in his early forties, was the representative in Israel of the U.S. defense company North American Rockwell (later bought out by Boeing). The two men had successfully cooperated on an Israeli-mediated deal whereby Rockwell covertly sold sophisticated surveillance equipment to Iran to help prop up its pro-Israel shah.¹³

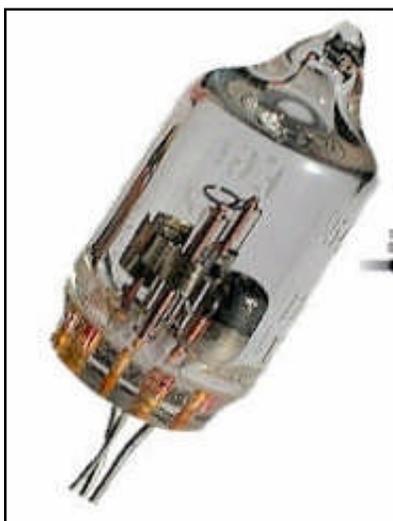
Now, the stakes were higher. Milchan was sizing up his American friend for a far riskier enterprise, one that promised a much greater windfall, but meant leaving his job at Rockwell, along with his benefits and pension, and starting his own front company. LAKAM had concluded that Smyth was “recruitable:” he liked the good life, enjoyed the company of women, felt he was underappreciated and underpaid at Rockwell, came down on the “right” side of Israel’s treatment of the Arabs and, Milchan observed, insisted on using his title of “doctor” every chance he had.

Smyth took the bait and, in January 1973, founded his front company, California-based Milco, which he ran from his home. U.S. intelligence knew that Milco was a new supplier for Israel’s military needs, because Smyth sent regular reports to the CIA as a condition of maintaining his security clearance. Milchan had told him it was better to operate within the system, right under the government’s nose, and then claim it was an innocent mistake if things went wrong.

The first items shipped to Israel were solid-fuel rocket components. Later shipments pushed the limits of legality, such as barrels of butyl, a compound used to bind explosive powders into solid rocket fuel, ammonium perchlorate, Butarez, condensers, and hundreds of other dual-use components, totaling in the tens of millions of dollars. All were shipped by Smyth to the end-user, Rehovot Instruments Ltd., in Israel.

Then came the krytrons.

In the summer of 1975, Milchan’s assistant, Dvora Ben Yizhak, sent Smyth an order for 400 krytrons. Smyth located the tubes, but be-



cause they could be used for triggering nuclear weapons, he needed an export license from the U.S. State Department, which he requested on October 30, 1975. That petition was denied, as were subsequent petitions. But, by now, the CIA had become interested in Smyth's activities.

Four years went by. Then, in 1979, Dvora Ben Yizhak sent Smyth a coded order for multiple shipments of 30 to 40 krytrons to be sent to Heli Trading Ltd., one of Milchan's satellite companies.

Smyth knew it would be risky but, by now, he wanted very much to please his major client. So, between 1979 and 1982, he sent 13 shipments, totally some 810 nuclear triggers, to Heli. On the export statement he called them cold-cathode, gas-filled tubes. If he got caught he would say he didn't realize they were krytrons. But he didn't get caught ... not, that is, until the 14th shipment.

This time, the U.S. manufacturer, EG&G, had placed a clear "WARNING" on the box: "The Export of This Product Requires a Munitions Export License." Smyth ignored the warning and dispatched the 14th shipment, as he did the others.

Shortly thereafter, on New Year's Day 1983, Smyth went to work at his Huntington Beach, CA office, having long since moved out of his home office, only to find his typewriters missing, along with a number of computers, and a highly sensitive radio scrambler that had been rejected for export to Israel by the State Department. Smyth had to report the break-in to the local police and the FBI and, fearing they would find out anyway, he admitted to accidentally having shipped the krytrons to Milchan's company.

In Israel, the new LAKAM chief, Rafi Eitan, directed Milchan to sever all contact with Smyth, whom he called "burnt."

The police eventually recovered the stolen goods—the burglar was a young employee—but when Smyth's wife went to retrieve them, she was met by a U.S. customs agent who wanted to speak to Milco's president. Their talks went on for months. Meanwhile, the orders dried up. Then, on Christmas

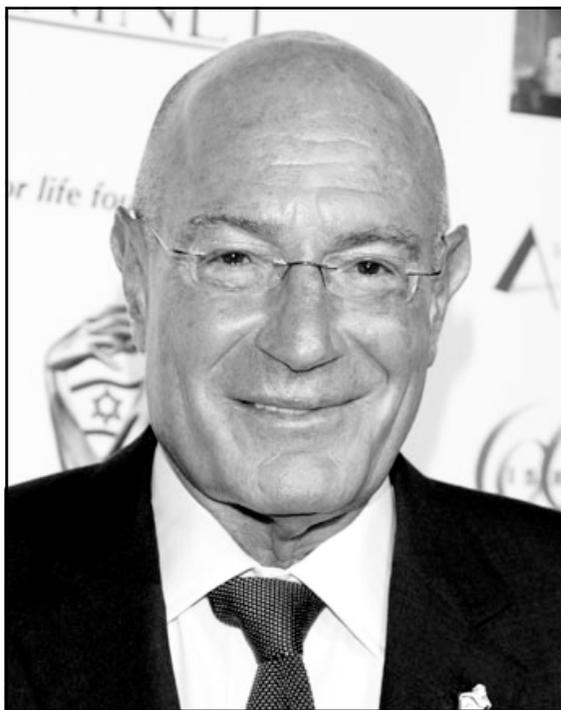
Eve 1984, Smyth received a letter ordering him to appear at the Federal Prosecutor's office in Los Angeles "to answer questions about exporting krytrons without a license, and to discuss possible high crimes and misdemeanors." He phoned Milchan in Israel, but Milchan didn't take his calls.

In April 1985 Smyth was indicted for smuggling nuclear triggers to Israel. The trial was scheduled for mid-August, and he was instructed to surrender his passport. Prior to the trial date, Smyth dyed his gray hair black, and he and his wife took Milco's \$15,000 emergency cash and flew out

of LA's International Airport to Frankfurt, Germany, where, now a fugitive from justice, he cleared passport control by presenting a passport of a Dr. Jon Schiller who looked remarkably like the hair-dyed Dr. Richard Smyth. Where he obtained the passport is a mystery.

Meanwhile, back in Israel, Arnon Milchan, fearing the investigation would lead to him, went to his recruiter, Shimon Peres, then Israel's prime minister, and asked him to ask President Reagan to "make this go away." It is another mystery whether or not Peres interceded, but Milchan was given assurances that he was in the clear.

Looking back at that dinner at the Kasbah in 1972, the two men seated at the table would embark on two disparate journeys. Smyth would remain a fugitive until he foolishly applied for his Social Security benefits and was arrested in Malaga, Spain, in July 2001. He would plead guilty to violating the



Arnon Milchan

U.S. Arms Export Control Act and, in November 2001, be sentenced to 40 years in prison along with a \$20,000 fine, although he would be free within four years.

Milchan, meanwhile, would prosper as a Hollywood mogul, producing over 100 movies, and assuming ownership of the Israeli network which transmits Israeli television programming to the United States and Canada. In 2006, *Forbes* listed him as the 240th richest person on the planet, with a net worth of \$3.6 billion.

Israel and South Africa

It is the worst kept of secrets that Israel has somewhere between 80 and 400 nuclear warheads. Still, it is one thing to have the bomb and another to have tested it—which brings us to South Africa.

In our April-May 2007 issue of *The Link*, “About That Word Apartheid,” we noted the affinity between Israel and apartheid South Africa. In June 1917, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the future first president of Israel, and Gen. Jan Christian Smuts, the future prime minister of South Africa, met in London to exploit British imperial interests for their own purposes. Weizmann argued that a Palestine opened for Jewish settlement would help England safeguard its Middle East interests. Smuts, who participated in planning the Balfour Declaration, saw the wisdom of supporting the Zionist enterprise, as Jews in South Africa, by the end of World War I, constituted per capita the wealthiest Jewish community in the world.

This alliance was examined in our October-November 1988 *Link*, “Israel and South Africa: A Natural Alliance” by Robert Ashmore. What apartheid South Africa and the Jewish state had in common was a theology of seeing themselves as God’s “chosen people,” as well as a self-appointed mission to be an outpost of western civilization in dark corners of the Third World. Both had to deal with indigenous populations, either by killing them, driving them from their ancestral land, or rounding them up into Bantustans. And because of this, both had to rely on development of military superiority as a guarantee of status quo survival.

By 1961, South Africa had become Israel’s chief trading partner in Africa. When Israel launched its

Six Day War in June 1967, the South African government released over \$28 million to Israel from Zionist groups and permitted South African volunteers to work and fight in Israel. As the prime minister of South Africa B. J. Vorster put it, both countries must “fight against enemies bent on their destruction.”

To that end, Israel and South Africa engaged in joint research and production of nuclear weapons. In 1963, South Africa, which has the fourth largest uranium reserves in the world, shipped ten tons of uranium to Israel for use in the Dimona nuclear reactor. In September 1979, the two countries detonated a nuclear device over the South Atlantic. At the same time, Israel supplied South Africa with the Jericho missile, capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. Both countries developed a project to build nuclear submarines in South Africa, with assistance from Israeli engineers and design experts. Indeed, Israeli expertise provided South Africa with Dabur patrol and Reshef missile boats, Gabriel sea-to-sea missiles, training in Israel for South African navy personnel, electronic border fences, microwave detection and radar system, natural uranium rods, minefields, and state-of-the-art night vision helicopter equipment.

In 1968, Israel and South Africa refused to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and they barred inspection of their nuclear plants by the International Atomic Energy Commission.

In November 1977, The United Nations Security Council imposed a Mandatory Arms Embargo on South Africa. However, Israel’s foreign minister, Moshe Dayan, said Israel would ignore the resolution. South Africa traded 50 metric tons of yellowcake uranium for 30 grams of Israeli tritium, a radioactive isotope used as a component in triggering thermonuclear reactions.

On December 13, 1984, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 39/72C, entitled “Relations between Israel and South Africa.” It declared: “that the increasing collaboration by Israel with the racist regime of South Africa, especially in the military and nuclear fields, in defiance of resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, is a serious hindrance to international action for the eradication of apartheid ... and constitutes a threat to international peace and security.”

It would take another decade of international sanctions to end apartheid in South Africa, despite the racist regime's military superiority. On May 10, 1994, while watching Nelson Mandela take the oath of office as president of the new, desegregated South Africa, F. W. de Klerk, the out-going president of the apartheid regime reflected on his Afrikaner ancestors: "The dream they had dreamt of being a free and separate people, with their own right to national self-determination in their own national state in southern Africa was the ideal to which I myself had clung until I finally concluded, after a long process of deep introspection, that, if pursued, it would bring disaster to all the peoples of our country, including my own." Might there be a message here for Israel's leaders?

Mordechai Vanunu

He was born in 1954 in Morocco, the son of Orthodox Jews who emigrated to Israel in 1963 and settled in Beersheba, the largest city in the Negev desert.

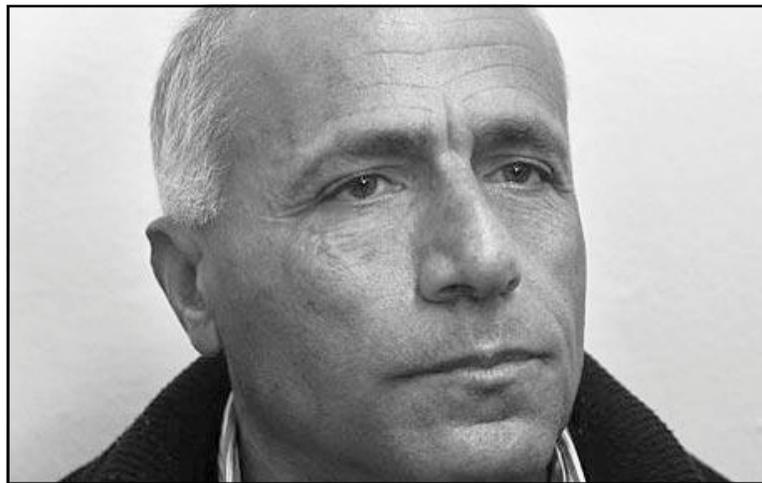
In 1977, after intensive training, Mordechai was employed as a nuclear plant technician and shift manager at the Negev Nuclear Research Center, an Israeli facility, south of Dimona, that developed and manufactured nuclear weapons.

In 1979, he became a part-time student at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheba, graduating in 1985 with a BA in philosophy and geography. In his security file at the Negev Nuclear Research Center it was noted that he had displayed "left-wing and pro-Arab beliefs" at the university. In 1985, Vanunu secretly smuggled a camera into the research center and covertly took 57 photographs. Soon after, he was fired for participating in a pro-Arab rally that called for the creation of a Palestinian state.¹⁴

In late 1985, Vanunu took a backpacking trip

through the Far East, eventually ending up in Australia where he took a job as a taxi driver in Sydney. During this time he joined the Anglican Church of Australia. He also met Oscar Guerrero, a freelance journalist, who persuaded him to sell his story, claiming that it along with the photographs were worth up to \$1 million.¹⁵

Newsweek turned down the story, but the British Sunday Times showed interest. In early September 1986, Vanunu flew to London and, in violation of his non-disclosure agreement with the Negev Nuclear Research Center, he revealed to The Times



Mordechai Vanunu

what he knew of Israel's nuclear program, along with the photographs he had taken at the Dimona site. He also gave detailed descriptions of lithium-6 separation required for the production of tritium, an essential ingredient of fusion-boosted fission bombs. And he went on to describe

the plutonium processing that was used which, he said, gave a production rate of about 30kg per year. From this it was estimated that Israel had sufficient plutonium for about 150 nuclear weapons.¹⁶

Vanunu has said that he intended to share the money he would have received from the Sunday Times with the Anglican Church of Australia. But the Times put a hold on the payment, while it checked his story with leading nuclear weapons experts.

Frustrated, Vanunu approached a rival newspaper, the tabloid Sunday Mirror owned by Robert Maxwell, a businessman widely believed to have close links with Mossad. Whether through Maxwell or through his journalists who may have contacted the Israeli embassy to confirm Vanunu's story, the Israeli government learned of the "traitor" and decided it had to act.

Vanunu was known to welcome female compan-

ionship, so an Israeli Mossad agent, masquerading as an American tourist called "Cindy," befriended him, and persuaded him to fly with her to Rome on a holiday. At the same time, the Israeli Navy's INS Noga was ordered to the Italian coast. Disguised as a merchant ship, the Noga was fitted with electronic surveillance equipment and satellite communications gear. In an encrypted message to the captain, the ship was ordered to drop anchor in international waters just off the Italian port city of La Spezia.

Once in Rome, Vanunu and "Cindy" took a taxi to an apartment, where three Mossad operatives overpowered Vanunu, injecting him with a paralyzing drug. Later that night, a white van hired by the Israeli embassy arrived at the apartment. Vanunu was carried to it on a stretcher. The ambulance then proceeded to a prearranged meeting point along the coast. Vanunu was transferred to a waiting speedboat, which then rendezvoused with the waiting Noga. (One wonders if the cab driver, ambulance driver, speedboat driver and apartment owner were all sayanim.)

Mordechai Vanunu arrived back in Israel on October 6, 1986, the day after *The Sunday Times* published his exposé, and the world could see what Israel has so long refused to admit. He was sentenced to 18 years in prison. More than 11 of those years were spent in solitary confinement, allegedly out of concern that he might spill more Israeli nuclear secrets.

On April 21, 2004, he was released from prison, subject to such prohibitions as no contact with non-Israelis, no phone calls, no Internet access, and no leaving the State of Israel. He has been arrested several times for violating these restrictions.

Seldom mentioned in his biography is his adoption by an American couple, Mary and Nick Eoloff; their story is told by them in our April-May 2004 issue of *The Link*.

In October 2010, the International League for Human Rights announced that Mordechai Vanunu was awarded the Carl von Ossietzky Medal, named for the German pacifist and recipient of the 1935 Nobel Peace Prize, who was imprisoned for speaking out against Nazi militarism. On November 16 the League sent an open letter to Prime Minister Benja-

min Netanyahu, Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Interior Minister Eli Yishai requesting that Vanunu be allowed to receive the medal at the Award Ceremony in Berlin scheduled for December 12. All three turned down the request.

Mordechai Vanunu and these men are polar opposites: for Vanunu, Judaism is a religion, for them it is a racial designation; Vanunu is a pacifist, they are military men; Vanunu wants a nuclear-free Middle East, they want Israeli nuclear hegemony in the Middle East; Vanunu is an ex-Zionist, they are Zionists in the tradition that goes back to Zalman Shapiro and David Ben Gurion.

The Samson Option

The United Nations General Assembly, on Dec. 4, 2012, approved a resolution calling on Israel to join the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) "without further delay," and to open its nuclear facilities to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The vote was 174 to six, with six abstentions. Voting against the resolution were: Israel, the United States, Canada, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau.

Israel, of course, has never owned up to having "the bomb" — or of not having it; it's called "nuclear ambiguity." This both allows it to continue receiving direct U.S. aid, now totaling some \$3.15 billion per year, and shields it from inspections and the threat of IAEA discretionary and obligatory sanctions.

It's a charade, of course. The U.S. government knows that Israel has a full range of nuclear weapons for every imaginable contingency: atomic bombs to reduce every Arab capital to ashes; nuclear land mines to obliterate Arab tanks should they try to enter Israel; neutron bombs to explode over Arab forces on Israeli territory, that reduce the risk to Israeli citizens while devastating enemy forces. There is increasing speculation that Israel possesses thermonuclear weapons, H-bombs, making it not only a regional but a world superpower, as well as "micronukes" and "tinynukes," suitable for destroying buried command and control facilities. Indeed, Israeli officers have been taught by U.S. military strategists on how to use tactical nuclear weapons in a crowded environment.¹⁷

How this nuclear arsenal has affected U.S. foreign policy was the subject of investigative journalist Seymour Hersh's 1991 exposé "The Samson Option." The Samson here is the biblical Samson who, endowed with superhuman strength, pulled down the pillars of the temple in an act of suicidal revenge, killing thousands of Philistines along with himself. Hersh picked Samson as the face of a nuclear Israel because, more than once, when confronted with Arab military resistance, it threatened the U.S. that it would pull down the entire Middle East if its superpower friend didn't do what it wanted. Or as former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon put it: "We are much more important than Americans think. We can take the Middle East with us whenever we go."¹⁸ Hersh called this by its unvarnished name: nuclear blackmail.

This sense of invincibility reached its peak in 1967 when, in the predawn hours of June 5, Israeli warplanes attacked 25 Arab airbases from Damascus in Syria to Luxor in Egypt. When the war ended – it took six days – Israel had seized the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. The Jewish state appeared a David, surrounded by paper tiger Arab Goliaths.

In the years that followed, Arab leaders tried to negotiate the return of their lands, but a triumphant Israel had little incentive to trade land for peace.¹⁹ In the summer of 1973, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan declared Israel "on the threshold of the crowning era of the return to Zion," a judgment he based on "the superiority of our forces over our enemies and the jurisdiction of the Israeli Government from the Jordan to the Suez."²⁰

Then the unthinkable happened. Preemptively, on October 6, 1973, the Egyptian army attacked across the Sinai and Syria invaded the Golan Heights. For Jews, it was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and, for Muslims, Ramadan. In the first three days, Israel lost 500 tanks and 49 aircraft. In the Sinai Egyptian forces beat off three Israeli tank divisions; on the Golan Heights, Syrian forces rolled through Israeli defenses right up to the edge of Galilee. Haifa was hours away. A chastened Moshe Dayan lamented "This is the end of the Third Temple."²¹

To hold on to the lands it had captured in 1967 – not to mention its pre-'67 land – Israel called on the United States for an immediate airlift of tanks, guns, planes, and ammunition. The problem was, the Nixon Administration was monitoring the war and, according to Seymour Hersh, Henry Kissinger, then Secretary of State, wanted to delay the resupply in order to let the Arabs win back some of their lands, along with some self-respect, thereby setting up the possibility of a serious land-for-peace negotiation after the war.²²

The Israeli government was furious. Meeting with her kitchen cabinet on October 8, Prime Minister Gold Meir decided to arm Israel's nuclear arsenal and, resorting to the Samson Option, to target the Egyptian and Syrian military headquarters, among other strategic sites. Then she informed Washington of the unprecedented action, and demanded that, if it wanted to avoid the nuclear option, it had to launch an immediate airlift of replacement arms and ammunition.²³

It worked. "By the evening of October 9," Kissinger wrote in the second volume of his memoirs, *Years of Upheaval*, "Israel had been assured that its war losses would be made up." Later, Kissinger would admit to Hermann Eilts, U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, that there had been intimations that if the Israelis "didn't get military equipment, and quickly, they might go nuclear."²⁴

And they did get it. First covertly. To obviate standard procurement procedures, weapons of active duty, front-line units in the U.S. Seventh Army in Europe were shipped without the required consultation with the government of West Germany. In America, air shipments from Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia were taken from stocks maintained at Langley, Virginia. These shipments contained AIM 9 missiles, artillery and tank ammunition, and cluster bombs, which arrived in time for the extensive fighting that developed during the critical week of October 10-17.

The overt operations of the U.S. Military Airlift Command took place between October 13 and November 22; they consisted of \$2.2 billion of weapons shipped in what turned out to be the largest airlift operation in military history.²⁵

When the final cease-fire was concluded on October 24, 1973, Israel again had the Sinai, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. The next 40 years would see no successful land-for-peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians; they would see only a half million Jewish settlers now living on Palestinian West Bank land. Israel, concluded Seymour Hersh, had used its nuclear arsenal to blackmail Washington into a major policy change.²⁶

Babylon and Beyond

The threat to go nuclear is infinitely more credible if there is no corresponding threat of nuclear retaliation. It's one thing to have "the bomb," it's another to know that the one you're aiming it at does not. This has been Israel's ever-present preoccupation.

Case in point: on June 7, 1981, 16 Israeli Air Force planes took off from Etzion airbase in occupied eastern Sinai. Crossing over Saudi Arabia, without the Saudis' permission, the planes approached the huge dome of Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor, located just southeast of Baghdad. Eight F-16 planes, each carrying two 2,000-pound laser-guided bombs, then swept down and decimated the reactor, core and all. All planes returned safely. Operation Babylon was declared an unqualified success.

The next day, Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin gave the reasons for the strike: Sources of "unquestionable reliability" had confirmed that Iraq intended, despite statements to the contrary, to produce atomic bombs, and that the reactors would "go critical" as early as July 1, 1981; Saddam Hussein had stated in the "official" Iraqi newspaper *Al-Thawra* of October 4, 1980, that the nuclear reactor was to be used "against the Zionist enemy" and, finally, Iraq had built a secret bomb manufacturing installation 130 feet below the nuclear core which could not be seen by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors.

Not one of these allegations was true, as Stephen Green pointed out in his book "Living by the Sword."²⁷

As for the sources of "unquestioned reliability,"

the U.S. Senate Committee of Foreign Relations looked into them and found just the opposite: Iraq could not have taken even the most preliminary steps to produce a nuclear bomb without detection by the IAEA, and the July date for going critical was equally untrue, as Dr. Herbert Kouts, chairman of the Department of Nuclear Energy at Brookhaven Laboratories testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

As for Saddam's statement in *Al-Thawra*, Israel later admitted it was bogus, explaining that the prime minister had been the victim of "poor staff work." And about that "secret bomb installation," Begin, when pressed, changed the depth from 130 feet to 13, and a few days after that, Major General Yehoshua Sagi, head of Modiin (Israeli military intelligence), announced that there was no "secret room."

On June 19, 1981, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 487, condemning the attack and calling on Israel to compensate Iraq for damages and to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. The United States, fearing an Arab backlash if it vetoed the resolution, voted for it, but in the months that followed, it made no effort to bring pressure on its close friend to comply with the resolution. Israel had sent the message it wanted: We have the bomb, there shall be no other bombs before us.

That message was sent to Syria on September 6, 2007, in Operation Orchard, when Israeli Air Force fighter jets crossed into Syrian airspace, destroyed a suspected nuclear reactor in the Deir ez-Zor region of the country, then violated Turkish airspace on their return. The Israelis claimed that soil samples taken from the facility contained nuclear material that came from North Korea.

In his memoir "Decision Points," President George W. Bush wrote that Israeli Prime Minister Olmert had requested that the U.S. be the one to bomb the Syrian site, but that he, Bush, refused, saying he did not consider the intelligence definitive on whether the plant was part of a nuclear weapons program.²⁸

IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei criticized the raid, saying that Syria's ability to construct and run a complex nuclear process was doubtful. And he

noted that satellite photographs had led experts to doubt “that the targeted construction was in fact a nuclear site.”²⁹

Indeed, more than one news source, including The New York Times of January 12, 2008, noted that at the time of the attack the site had no obvious barbed wire or air defenses that would normally ring a sensitive military facility. As for the soil samples, Syria pointed out that had the facility been a nuclear site, inspectors should have found a large amount of graphite, which they didn’t, while the 80 particles of uranium that were found in over half a million tons of soil more probably came from the missiles themselves that Israel launched.³⁰

And now it’s Iran’s turn.

In 1992, Benjamin Netanyahu, then a member of the Israeli Knesset from the Likud list, warned his fellow parliamentarians that Iran was three to five years from producing a nuclear weapon, and that the threat had to be “uprooted by an international front headed by the U.S.”

In 2007, the National Intelligence Estimate, representing the findings of America’s 16 spy agencies, concluded with “high confidence” that Iran had given up its nuclear weapons effort. In May 2009, the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported, “There is no sign that Iran’s leaders have ordered up a bomb.”

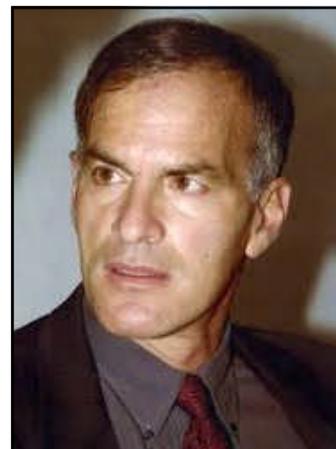
Yet, on September 16, 2012, now Prime Minister Netanyahu told NBC’s “Meet the Press” that the Iranians are “six months away from being about 90 percent of having the enriched uranium for an atom bomb.” Later that month he lectured the U.N. General Assembly: “It is not a question of whether Iran will get the bomb. The question is at what stage can we stop Iran from getting the bomb.”

And when President Obama visited Israel in March 2013, Netanyahu reminded him that the clock is ticking. In response, Obama assured the prime minister that the U.S.’s \$1 billion funding for Israel’s Iron Dome, the mobile air defense system designed to intercept short-range rockets, would not be interrupted by U.S. sequester cutbacks—even though U.S. defense and social programs would be.

Again!

The story is told that, when the first bomb rolled off the Dimona assembly line, one of the workers wrote on it the words NEVER AGAIN. The reference, of course, is to the Holocaust. But, if the intent of the writer was to prevent another unspeakable horror, then the focus would have been better placed on the cause of the Holocaust. And the cause of the Holocaust was the hideous ideology of Nazism.

In our December 1992 issue of *The Link*, Norman Finkelstein wrote that historians generally divide nationalism into two types: liberal nationalism with roots in the French Revolution and ethnic nationalism with roots in German Romanticism. Finkelstein explains the difference: “Liberal nationalism has as its main pillar the citizen: the state is constituted by its citizens and between citizens is complete legal equality. Romanticism’s main pillar is the ethnic nation: each state belongs to a particular ethnic nation, and the latter consequently occupies a privileged position in the state.”



Norman Finkelstein

The Germanic notion of nationalism culminated in Nazism, which preached the domination of society by the racially superior Aryan race. To preserve the purity of this master race, Nazis sought to purge society of people declared inferior and a threat to national survival, such as Jews and Romani (Gypsies). And they supported territorial expansion in order to gain Lebensraum (living space) as a law of nature, whereby peoples of the superior race, especially those facing overpopulation in their given territory, can displace peoples of an inferior race.

Zionism has its roots in Germanic nationalism. Finkelstein quotes the mainstream Israeli historian Anita Shapira, who acknowledged that Zionism “adopt[ed] and transplant[ed] concepts deriving from German or Pan-Slavic sources of volkish na-

tionalism.” Nor was the irony lost on the Israeli writer, Aharon Barnea, that “a state for the Jewish people was ... created which regards the Holocaust as the ultimate reason for its existence.... [Yet] the current Jewish ethnic concept of nationality traces its origins to the national romantic model which Germany developed to such perfection.”³¹

In his April-May 2008 *Link*, Israeli historian Ilan Pappé noted that, when the United Nations in November 1947 offered to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state, it gave the Jewish minority 56% of the land. The problem, however, was that this 56% contained an equal number of Jews and Palestinians, thereby threatening the Jews’ racial dominance; it also jeopardized the Zionist aim to ingather Jews from all over the world who, and only who, upon proof of their Jewishness, would receive automatic citizenship.



Ilan Pappé

“Even a cursory knowledge of Zionist ideology and strategy,” says Pappé, “should have made it clear to the U.N. architects that such a demographic reality would lead to the cleansing of the local population from the future Jewish state.”

And that’s what happened.

On March 10, 1948, the Haganah, the main Jewish underground in Palestine, devised a plan, called Plan D, which resulted in its taking over 78% of Palestine. It instructed the Jewish forces to cleanse the Palestinian areas that fell under their control. This cleansing lasted well into the 1950s. When it was over, of the approximately 1,050,000 Palestinians living in these areas, 950,000 were expelled. Then, as we noted, following the preemptive war of 1967, Israel took over the last 22% of historic Palestine, and immediately began colonizing it, to the point where today more than 500,000 Jewish settlers live in the

West Bank and East Jerusalem, forcing the remaining Palestinians into Bantustan-like enclaves.

It should be noted that, when Pappé refers to this as Zionist ideology, not all Jews are Zionists; indeed there have been a number of courageous Jews, including Ilan Pappé, Norman Finkelstein and Mordechai Vanunu, who have denounced Zionism for the racist ideology it is. And there are Christian Zionists, who view Jews as God’s Chosen People, whose return to the Promised Land is a mandatory prelude to the Second Coming of Christ.

What we tend to forget, however, but what all Zionists know instinctively, is that, if you take someone’s land, you better have a very powerful defense system in place, because these dispossessed people will want to get their land back, no matter how long it takes—or what it takes. This may mean erecting a high separation wall, or a billion dollar iron dome, or manufacturing a nuclear bomb, and making sure the dispossessed, or their allies, don’t get their hands on one. Truth be told, the words on that first bomb that came out of Dimona should have read: YET AGAIN.

So what’s the answer? We get some clues from another racist state that developed nuclear weaponry: apartheid South Africa, where Bantustans were born. It was world condemnation and economic sanctions that finally convinced the white Afrikaners that, as Bismarck reputedly put it, you can do everything with a bayonet except sit on it. So they abandoned their racist laws and adopted a system of one person, one vote, whereby each person stands equal before the law. Not surprisingly, the new South Africa found it no longer needed nuclear bombs.

Can the same happen to apartheid Israel?

One hopes against hope. ■

End Notes

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In Appreciation

Ruth Pauline Monson 1926-2013

In his reflections on Ruth Monson's life, The Rev. Kent Johnson of the English Lutheran Church in La Crosse, WI, noted that Ruth regularly gave him material on the plight of the Palestinians, specifically copies of *The Link*. It reminded him, he said, of the widow in the parable of the judge who refused to grant her justice against her opponent. Undeterred, the widow persisted to the point where the judge relented just to keep her quiet. Pastor Johnson then echoed Jesus's own commentary: "Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?"

Ruth was such a crier after justice. For some 11 years she lived with her husband, John, in the Middle East, where they witnessed, as do so many Americans with eyes to see, the cruelty of a military occupation that is being subsidized with American tax dollars. When they returned home to La Crosse in 1990, Ruth became an active member in the Prayer Vigil for Peace with Justice in the Middle East, the La Crosse ELCA Synod Middle East Subcommittee, several Bethlehem Events at English Lutheran and, last year, she offered a four-week series at the church entitled Steadfast Hope.

Prior to her death, Ruth expressed the wish that, in lieu of flowers, a donation be made in her memory to Americans for Middle East Understanding. Such recognition was for us a profound honor.

But Ruth went further. She asked that each donor be sent a complimentary copy of *The Link*. Getting the word out, after all, was what mattered. And, indeed, each of the contributors—and there were many of them—will receive this issue of *The Link* which we are pleased to dedicate in Ruth's memory.

Sumud is the Arabic word that's often translated as steadfastness. But it's more than that. It's more a single-minded, raw tenacity, not unlike the kind the widow had before her unjust judge.

Ruth Monson had that kind of steadfastness.

**John Mahoney,
Executive Director**

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