

ISRAEL SEEN LIFTING **NUCLEAR VEIL IN IRAN** **STAND-OFF**

Mon Sep 25, 2006 1:38 PM BST By Dan Williams

Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: This article makes it clear that the world is getting closer rather than further away from seeing the day nuclear weapons will again be used in warfare. Other news items are reporting that the Muslims are amassing arms in Lebanon and Gaza, presumably to restart the war that raged for a month between Hezbollah and Israel during Aug, 06. When this war does restart, many think it is likely that Israel will attack Syria as the source of the problem. Some speculate that doing so could rapidly escalate the conflict, resulting in Israel's need to use their nuclear weapons in a desperate act of survival. If they do, it will likely be a complete fulfillment of the Isaiah Chapter 17 prophecy (the complete destruction of Damascus, and severe wounding of Israel).

TEL AVIV (Reuters) - In October 1973, with its forces battling to repel invasions by Egypt and Syria, Israel did what had previously been unthinkable: It briefly wheeled its nuclear-capable Jericho-1 missiles out of their secret silos.

That, historians believe, was picked up by U.S. spy satellites and stirred up fears in Washington of a catastrophic flare-up between the Jewish state and the Soviet-backed Arabs. Message received, an urgent American shipment of conventional arms to Israel was quick to follow, and helped turn the war. With Israel's current arch-foe Iran seen gaining the ability to produce nuclear weapons within a few years, and preventive military options limited, some experts now anticipate another "lifting of the veil" on the assumed Israeli atomic arsenal.

Were that to happen, experts say, the objective would be to establish a more open military deterrence vis-a-vis Iran and perhaps win Israel's nuclear option formal legitimacy abroad.

"No one should simply assume that Israel would stay where it is now with its ambiguous capability if Iran becomes a nuclear power," said Professor Gerald Steinberg, head of the Conflict Management Programme at Bar-Ilan University near Tel Aviv. "Israeli policy is likely to change, in order to demonstrate that the country has continued strategic superiority," he said.

Israel neither confirms nor denies it has the Middle East's only nuclear weapons, under an "ambiguity" policy billed as warding off enemy states while avoiding a regional arms race. Steinberg said this might be abandoned only as a last resort to persuade a nuclear-armed Iran that it stood to suffer far greater devastation in any full-blown future conflict.

"It's not desirable, but this is about survival," he said. Iran, the world's fourth largest oil exporter, says its nuclear programme is for energy needs alone. But calls by its President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for Israel to be "wiped off the map" have fuelled Western calls for the programme to be curbed.

MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION?

Talk of a nuclear stand-off between Israel and Iran has sparked comparisons with the "mutually assured destruction" formula that reigned during the Cold War and, more recently, between India and Pakistan.

But those precedents assume a parity that may not exist with Israel and Iran. Militarily advanced Israel is geographically small and vulnerable. Iran's atomic ambitions are at fledgling stage but its large size could help it survive a major strike.

"The use of a nuclear bomb against Israel would completely destroy Israel, while (the same) against the Islamic world would only cause damage. Such a scenario is not inconceivable," former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said in a 2001 speech.

There is also speculation that Ahmadinejad might welcome an apocalyptic confrontation, meaning the idea of a deterrent would not work. Yet he answers to Iranian clerics who work by committee and thus provide a rational set of safeguards.

Reuven Pedatzur, defence analyst for the respected Israeli daily Haaretz, proposed that the country, under U.S. guidance, go public with its nuclear capability in the hope of building back-channel ties with Iran and establishing mutual deterrence.

"Israel cannot continue to rely on it (ambiguity policy) if Iran has nuclear weapons. This is because ambiguity leaves too many grey areas. The enemy cannot know with certainty what the red lines are and when he is risking an Israeli nuclear response," he wrote.

"There must be a deterrent policy that will leave no room for misunderstandings," he added. "Thus, for example, we would make it clear that the identification of any missile launched from Iran in a westerly direction means, as far as we are concerned, the launch of an Iranian nuclear missile at us."

Declaring capabilities is one way for a nation to become an official nuclear power. The other is a controlled atomic blast. "If the Israelis really have any doubt about the credibility of their deterrence, they could conduct a nuclear test, say, in the Negev desert," said Gary Samore, a former adviser on nuclear non-proliferation in the U.S. National Security Council under President Bill Clinton. But he said the diplomatic fall-out of such a move would draw scrutiny away from Tehran and further alienate those Arab nations willing to endorse Western pressure on the Iranians. "It would be a godsend for Iran," Samore said.

NPT IN QUESTION

Israel did not sign the 1970 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It thus kept its main nuclear facility, outside the desert town of Dimona, exempt from inspection. It has received billions of dollars in aid from Washington, whose laws ban funding states with unregulated non-conventional arsenals. A nuclear weapons test by Israel would effectively blow away that U.S. blind eye. Iran, in turn, could withdraw from the NPT and argue that it should not be subjected to sanctions. After that, other Middle East states would likely seek atomic arms.

Avner Cohen, author of the seminal study "Israel and the Bomb", has suggested that Israel seek to form a new nuclear pact along with India and Pakistan, which refuse to join the NPT.

"Such a protocol might permit them to retain their atomic programmes, but inhibit further development. It could also require cooperation with international nuclear export controls, prohibit explosive testing of nuclear devices, and call for the phased elimination of fissile material production," Cohen said.

Iran would not be able to join such a pact, he added, as it has violated the NPT by pursuing unauthorised nuclear projects.

Cohen poured cold water on the idea of Israel seeking mutual deterrence with a nuclear-armed Iran, noting that during the Cold War parity was achieved only after Washington and Moscow scraped through two crises -- over the 1948 Western airlift to Berlin and the 1962 deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba.

"The sense of stability associated with mutually assured destruction grew out of a learning curve," he said. "Israel had its learning through crisis, especially the 1973 war. Do we have time for the Iranians to learn? Will they learn?"

