

A Response to Patrick Pexton *What about Israel's nuclear weapons?*

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Abstract

While Israel has never come forward to confirm that their nuclear weapons exist, it has become a general understanding among states that they exist. The state has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and made it clear in the late 1960s that they would not be the first state in the Middle East to “introduce” nuclear weapons. However the ambiguity of their use of the word has led many to believe that it refers to openly testing and confirming their possession. Even though the basic perception supports the existence of Israel’s nuclear weapons, the United States has notably not pushed for them to be officially confirmed. This puts the average American worker in a compromising position, leaving them unable to either acknowledge these weapons of mass destruction nor criticize them without risking a halt in their professional progression. Although Pexton condemns the systems which have created this position, specifically denouncing the media’s lack of comprehensive analysis and coverage of Israel’s nuclear weapons, his piece is deficient in giving the reader a thorough detailing of Israel's relationship with nuclear weapons. Continuing the confidentiality Israel displays on the issue along with the laissez faire attitude adopted by the United States cannot allow for nuclear balance to ever be truly achieved or sustained.

Quite often, Israel is viewed as a delicate subject in the American political field. Our questionable ties to the state results in each individual and system holding their opinions on the matter quite strongly. While there are passionate, opposing beliefs, the discourse concerning the state of Israel and our connection to it is not often discussed in the manner it should be. Especially not on platforms that hold much weight. This bleeds over into the way workers in America discuss the issue. The passive nature of many American professionals regarding Israel is dangerous in regards to maintaining nuclear balance. They seemingly try to take the pressure off of themselves and place it onto other professionals however still attempting to seem engaged. Pexton, although criticizing this very occurrence, demonstrates it perfectly in his piece.²⁶

While, understandably, a dangerously passive nature of communicating a certain topic can not be overwhelmingly positive, there are some positive outcomes. Pexton discusses one benefit of the United States not pressuring Israel to be open about possessing nuclear weapons -- that there is no added pressure for other Arab states to have their own nuclear weapons. For many, keeping the number of states with access to nuclear weapons as low as possible is a main concern. So, the United States' underwhelming reaction to Israel's nuclear weapons helps achieve that goal. However, there is another benefit that Pexton does not address. Without other Arab states having control over nuclear weapons, there is less reason for the United States, and other nations, to call war onto those states under false pretenses. However, that is where the benefits end. Pexton goes on to mention the fear of criticizing Israel among American professionals as he says that it is almost an immediate way to stop the progression of one's career. This idea is supported by the mere existence of the Israel Anti-Boycott Bill.²⁷ Introduced in 2017, this bill would have criminalized individuals with involvement in foreign commerce supporting boycotts of Israel proposed by international government organizations. Yet, this bill did not pass.

Pexton goes on to give credence to the notion that because of Israel's origins, it is not at "fault" for having control of nuclear weapons.²⁸ However, the beginnings of Israel are irrelevant to the matter at hand. The state of Israel continuously preaches peace among Arab nations and has attacked these states under the guise of bringing peace to the Middle East. Yet through these attacks, Israel itself fails to commit to a peaceful Middle East. Israel has long utilized the Begin Doctrine, the term widely used to describe its government's attacks on any enemy state's production of weapons of mass destruction. Most notably this has applied to the production of nuclear weapons. The Israeli government has come forth to declare that it stands for its citizens and that it will not allow anything that could overwhelmingly harm them to be manufactured.²⁹ However, many have wondered if the Israeli government is simply trying to disguise its attempts to ensure no other state in the region obtains nuclear weapons. If one were to do so,

²⁶ Pexton, Patrick B. "Patrick Pexton: What about Israel's Nuclear Weapons?" The Washington Post. WP Company, August 31, 2012.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/patrick-pexton-what-about-israels-nuclear-weapons/2012/08/31/390e486a-f389-11e1-a612-3cfc842a6d89_story.html.

²⁷ Israel Anti-Boycott Act. Bill (2017).

²⁸ See Footnote 1.

²⁹ "Fact Sheet: Israel's Nuclear Arsenal." Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, June 23, 2020.
<https://armscontrolcenter.org/fact-sheet-israels-nuclear-arsenal/>.

Israel would be under more pressure to be open about their possession of nuclear weapons. It is no surprise that there is pressure among American professionals to not critique Israel as the state's actions clearly mirror similar calls for peace made by the United States that are often a mask to give reason for attacking another nation.

The main point Pexton attempts to bring home is the manner in which the media is at fault for not giving the reality of Israel and its nuclear weapons more in depth coverage. I concur with this notion. Ultimately, any nation having control of nuclear weapons has the ability to affect anyone. It is therefore the job of the media to inform its viewers. Unfortunately, it is difficult to appreciate Pexton's calls when he displays the same actions that he criticizes. Without giving possible solutions to the fears that bar American professionals from criticizing Israel, it is futile that the author argues that we need more publications to discuss the presence of these weapons. Discussing Israel's nuclear weapons in more depth and with more analysis than the author does here would be contradictory to what he says is crucial information to understanding the general American position. While Pexton himself is the media, the most he does is state that Israel has nuclear weapons but gives no clear critique on the hypocrisy of this and, instead, spends most of his piece critiquing the media for not having proper coverage on the issue while he himself is engaging in that very type of lackluster coverage.

All in all, Pexton is the perfect example of the very thing he is criticizing. Solely mentioning the existence of the nuclear weapons that Israel possesses but not giving any concrete analysis is the type of coverage that Pexton began his piece critiquing. Yet overall, his thesis is correct. The only chance of keeping nation states holding states accountable is through national pressure. But national pressure can not occur without the average citizen being aware of the facts.

While there are benefits to Israel not being upfront about their possession of nuclear weapons, including the lowered pressure on neighboring states to obtain their own nuclear weapons, they do not outway the negative social and physical repercussions. On the international field, neither achieving nor sustaining nuclear balance is possible if the attitude displayed by both Israel and the United States continues and becomes standard practice.

