

# Israel and the Iranian Nuclear Threat

Iran has been concealing nuclear research for the past 18 years, despite signing the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1970 and is now believed to be at the "point of no return" in developing nuclear arms. These unconventional threats together with Iran's consistent support of terrorism, including links to al-Qaeda and support of Hizbullah, make Iran a most dangerous threat to the region and to the world and have put it at one with North Korea and Iraq in the so called tri-polar "axis of evil." Analysts argue that the prospect of a nuclear Iran would:

- Threaten Israeli, US, and European security.
- Harden Arab positions in any future peace negotiations.
- Increase militancy and embolden hard-liners.
- Destabilize the Gulf area.
- Encourage other countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Libya, to follow suit.

Since the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, Israel has come to regard the Islamic fundamentalist administration in Tehran as its number one enemy. For Israel Iranian nuclear capability poses a clear threat to its existence, particularly due to Iran's call for Israel's annihilation and its active support of acts of violence against Israel.

Although in response to intensive international pressure, Iran finally agreed to sign the additional protocol of the non-proliferation treaty in December 2003, this step is widely regarded with skepticism in the West due to Iran's past disregard of its obligations to the NPT.

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1. Since 2001 Iran has made significant progress in its nuclear program, apparently with the help of Pakistan and North Korea, as well as research institutes and commercial companies in Russia and China. Western intelligence sources report that Iran has constructed a number of nuclear facilities and that it plans to build more. This adds to the threat posed by Iran's Shehab-3 medium range ballistic missile which can reach targets in Israel. Although for the time being the Shehab-3 is thought to carry only conventional warheads, it will be able to carry a nuclear warhead if Iran manages to produce one small enough. A chemical or biological warhead is also a possibility. (Yiftach Shapir, Iranian Missiles: The Nature of the Threat, Tel Aviv Notes, No. 83, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, July 2003).
  2. In his State of the Union Address of late January 2002, US President George W. Bush coined the phrase "axis of evil," which has since become a common figure of speech. Bush maintained that "states like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger." (cited in Emily Landau and Ram Erez, The Nuclear Dimension of Axis of Evil, Strategic Assessment, Vol. 6, No. 1, The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, May 2003).
  3. Iran refuses to recognise Israel and top officials frequently call for the destruction of the Jewish

state. During a major military parade on September 22, 2003 the Islamic republic showed off six of its Shehab-3 missiles which were decorated with anti-Israeli and anti-US slogans, including one saying Israel should be "wiped off the map". Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz , in a lecture delivered to top Israel Defense Forces commanders defined Iran's nuclear efforts as "the gravest danger to Israel's existence in the future" (Aluf Ben, Haaretz, Oct. 12, 2003).