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Page 3 of 3 < Back The Untold Story of Israel's Bomb



Over time, the tentative Nixon-Meir understanding became the foundation for a remarkable U.S.-Israeli deal, accompanied by a tacit but strict code of behavior to which both nations closely adhered. Even during its darkest hours in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel was cautious not to make any public display of its nuclear capability.

Yet set against contemporary values of transparency and accountability, the Nixon-Meir deal of 1969 now stands as a striking and burdensome anomaly. Israel's nuclear posture is inconsistent with the tenets of a modern liberal democracy. The deal is also burdensome for the United States, provoking claims about double standards in U.S. nuclear nonproliferation policy.

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Compare the Nixon administration's stance toward Israel in 1969 with the way Washington is trying to accommodate India in 2006. As problematic as the proposed nuclear pact with New Delhi is, it at least represents an effort to deal openly with the issue.

Unlike the case of Iran today -- where a nation is publicly violating its NPT obligations and where the United States and the international community are acting in the open -- the White House in 1969 addressed the Israeli weapons program in a highly secretive fashion. That kind of deal-making would be impossible now.

Without open acknowledgment of Israel's nuclear status, such ideas as a nuclear-free Middle East, or even the inclusion of Israel in an updated NPT regime, cannot be discussed properly. It is time for a new deal to replace the Nixon-Meir understandings of 1969, with Israel telling the truth and finally normalizing its nuclear affairs.

cohenavner@msn.com

nsarchiv@gwu.edu

Avner Cohen is a senior research fellow at the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland and author of "Israel and the Bomb" (Columbia University Press). William Burr is a senior analyst at the

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National Security Archive at George Washington University. A longer version of this article appears in the May/June issue of the [Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists](#).

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