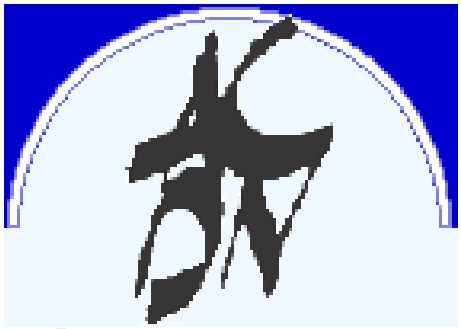
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Israeli journalist and human rights activist

Gideon Spiro wrote to President Obama

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Publication date: Friday 8 May 2009

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April 19, 2009

Dear Mr. President,

I am an Israeli journalist and human rights activist writing to ask for your intervention in preventing nuclear conflagaration in the Middle East.

On April 17 2009, the prestigious Israeli newspaper Haaretz, which is often referred to as "Israel's New York Times," published an oped - authored by its senior commentator on military and security affairs -calling for Israeli military action against the Iranian nuclear project.

When a newspaper that is considered liberal and moderate publishes such an article - at a time when an extreme right-wing government is assuming power - alarm bells should start ringing.

The task of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear arms is an important one, and the way to achieve that objective is not by military action, but through an international effort to create a Middle East free of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. It is impossible to achieve that objective without dealing with the main cause of the Middle East nuclear arms race - Israel.

Israel pushed the Middle East onto a course of a WMD-race. As a result of the brave actions of nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu - who exposed in a Sunday Times interview in 1986 what was going on behind the walls of the nuclear reactor in Dimona - we know that Israel is armed with hundreds of atom and hydrogen bombs. If we take into account the additional biological and chemical weapons that Israel produces in the Nes Ziona Biological Institute, a frightening picture emerges: a state, smaller than most Congressional Districts in the United States, that is a powder-keg of weapons of mass destruction.

And this is without even mentioning its vast quantities of conventional arms.

An Israeli attack on Iran would likely produce disastrous consequences which could draw the region into a nuclear conflict that would bring about the annihilation of states in the region. In this scenario, Israel is liable to be wiped out. The newly-appointed Foreign Minister of Israel Avigdor Lieberman, a settler and war-monger who in the past has threatened Egypt with the bombing of the Aswan Dam, is now a key player in the operation of Israel's nuclear trigger. It is an historical irony that Israel, which is home to many Holocaust survivors, has become a hotbed of radical leaders who would create the next holocaust - a nuclear holocaust.

But the repercussions of an Israeli attack on Iran will extend far beyond our region. It is most likely they will have devastating global consequences that will also cause massive harm to the United States.

Intelligence agencies all over the world are competing between themselves in assessing Iran's nuclear capability. The estimates vary and are sometimes diametrically opposed to each other. The truth is that no one knows what Iran is hiding in its facilities, but it can be helpful to draw an analogy from Israel's case.

Today we know that Israel developed nuclear arms while deceiving the United States government. You surely have learned the story of your predecessor, President John F. Kennedy, who tried to prevent Israel from acquiring nuclear weapons. He knew the dangers to regional and global stability that this program entailed. But the government of

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Israel succeeded in deceiving the American nucelar inspectors who were sent to Dimona, and the rest - as the common expression goes - is history. The Iranians are no less sophisticated than Israel.

The situation in which Israel maintains a nuclear monopoly cannot last forever because a nuclear Israel is a constant incentive for others to equip themselves with similar arms. The only effective and peaceful way to end this destructive WMD-race is through regional nuclear disarmament. And here is where you, as President of the United States, can assume a history-making leadership role.

The United States and Israel are allies -a mantra repeated by every American politician but not thouroughly analyzed. In reality, this alliance has a specail nature: one country finances and the other is financed. Israel's power rests to a great extent on US military and economic aid. Without the billions of dollars that the US transfers to it, Israel would be unable to finance the Occupation, the settlements, the army, and of course, its nuclear arsenal.

Mr. President, you were elected as the harbinger of a new era of rapproachment between hostile nations, a struggle against global pollution, and the elimination of nuclear weapons. To achieve these goals, it is necessary to rein in Israel, compel it to accept a regime of nuclear disarmament in our region, and oblige it to open all its nuclear facilities and missile sites to international inspection. Ditto for Iran and the other states in the Middle East.

In a volatile region like ours, in which Jews and Muslims claim a direct link with the Almighty and even purport to speak in His name, the existence of nuclear weapons is a grave threat to world peace. This is particularly true with regards to Israel and Iran, where many people believe in the Armageddon as a prelude to redemption, and some of these radicals are serving in key governmental positions. It is high time American leaders demanded from all actors in the region a policy of mutual disarmament, thus preventing the disastrous consequences of a nuclear conflagration.

I implore you to act in the spirit of this letter before it is too late.

Respectfully,

Gideon Spiro

Founding member of The Israeli Committee for A Middle East Free from Atomic, Biological and Chemical Weapons.

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