

Israel and its American Fig Leaf

By Tan Sri Ahmad Al Farra

On 11th November 2005 in Ramallah, I attended the first memorial for *al-shaheed* Yasser Arafat. My friend, Dr. Nasir Al Qudwa, the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, had requested for me to be the Master of Ceremony for this poignant occasion, of which I politely turned down. I had declined for two reasons. One, I felt I would not be able to control my emotions if I was to speak at this painful event and two; I was disappointed with the preparations for Arafat, whom I felt deserved much more grandeur. It did somehow comfort me during the ceremony, however, to see the sincere tears in the crowd's eyes, with their passionate constant cries of "*Allahu Akbar Nafdeeka Ya Shaheed*" (God is Great; We Will Sacrifice For Our Martyr). Towards the end of the ceremony, I tried to sneak away from the crowd to dry up my tears but failed miserably as old friends of mine forcibly tried to shake my hand.

I blindly made my way out of the crowd and went straight to Yasser Arafat's burial ground, to read the Al-Fatiha prayer for his soul. There I saw Dr. Sami Musallam, Arafat's director general and an old friend of mine. I stood in front of the tomb and raised my hands to recite Al-Fatiha. I had just begun to say "Assalamu Alaykum Abu Ammar" (Peace Be Upon You Abu Ammar – nom de guerre of Yasser Arafat) out loud when I broke down and started weeping uncontrollably. Sami tried to console me and with tears flowing freely, repeatedly told me to weep as they had "all wept till there were no tears left". We stood there, two grown men, crying despite ourselves as the security guards watched us. Embarrassed, I tried to walk away but had to lean on Sami; his crutch supporting the both of us. Sami then proceeded to lead me to the military operation room where Yasser Arafat had been besieged for more than two years by the Israeli troops (this a different story and event altogether, which I will one day divulge in greater detail). We entered the room –the whole two by three meters of it- and saw a number of Arafat's belongings scattered around –a cell phone, empty bottles of water, medical tablets, the remains of candle wax and several cell phone batteries (for when the Israeli military would cut the electrical power supply off), a prayer mat, and his military uniform. My throat was dry. With hot tears in my eyes, I hoarsely wondered out loud, "is this what Israel is afraid of? Is this why Israel has built its nuclear weapons; for this Palestinian Pentagon?"

That same remark had been a matter of discussion with *al-shaheed* Yasser Arafat, during his visit to Malaysia in 1999. During his official meeting with former Prime Minister Dato Sri Dr. Mahathir Mohd (Tun Dr. Mahathir), Arafat declared that Israel had 250 nuclear warheads and as long as they “depended on their arrogance of power, Israel would never be sincere in achieving peace and the whole region would remain seated on a barrel of sophisticated weapons”. This is the very essence of Israel and as long as they were in war, they would excel.

Israel, on the other hand, claims that it lives amongst twenty-two hostile Arab countries and has to keep its military superiority. It had cleverly exploited the atmosphere of the Cold War between the former Soviet Union and United States of America. Right now, however, after a peace treaty with Egypt and Jordan, as well as trade relations with various Arab and Islamic countries, what are the Israeli reasons for developing and enriching its nuclear capabilities?

The report issued by the Arab league on 15 October 1997 stated that the countries to the east and south of the Mediterranean Sea faced great problems caused by Israeli nuclear reactors. Israel has a prominent nuclear reactor in Dimona, at the Negev desert. In addition to that, ten other nuclear reactors currently exist, five of which are near the Mediterranean Sea and have never been inspected by any International organizations. The radiant wastes of these reactors are dumped in the Arabian Seas. Aside the dangerous problems caused by these reactors, sea resources are destroyed while sea and river waters become polluted.

Foreign sources confirm that Israel’s nuclear reactors include a huge arsenal of nuclear weapons which would suffice to destroy the Middle East in a matter of minutes. Israel, however, has always refused to allow international inspection of the Dimona facility or to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

In 1986, Mordechai Vanunu, a former Israeli technician at the Dimona site, was jailed for 18 years for providing information and including photos published in the UK's Sunday Times. In 1998, Anver Cohen, an Israeli writer living in self-imposed exile in the United Kingdom, published a book called “Israel and the Bomb” –arguing that there was an Israeli-US understanding that Washington would turn a blind eye to Israel's nuclear programme –provided Israel kept a low profile and did not carry out nuclear

tests. Naturally, the Israeli authorities wanted to question Cohen but were unable to. On 23 August 2000, the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) proved that Israel had made enough plutonium for up to 200 nuclear weapons and that the Dimona reactor had been operating since 1965. Part of FAS's work is to monitor non-conventional weapons capabilities throughout the world; and satellite photographs of the secret Israeli nuclear facility at Dimona have appeared on their website. FAS also claims that by the late 1990s, the US intelligence community estimated that Israel possessed 75-130 nuclear weapons. These included warheads for mobile Jericho-1 and Jericho-2 missiles, bombs for Israeli aircrafts and possibly other tactical nuclear weapons.

In July 2004, Mr. Mohamed El Baradei, the director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), went to Israel with the aim of only visiting one of the nuclear reactors- the one in Dimona. He was disrespectfully and arrogantly met by the Israeli government who refused to allow him to visit this reactor. The IAEA reached the highest level of humiliation possible when the Israeli Government curtly informed them that Dimona was "not subject to the control of IAEA". Subsequently, Mr. El Baradei released a feeble public statement affirming that he "would be happy to have the opportunity in visiting the reactor at any other time".

Israel –who clearly engages in state terrorism and is considered to be a source of destabilization to the world- seems to rule above laws and International Covenants. As well, Israel is never subject to accountability regardless of the crimes committed. Of course, if not for the American administration's indefinite support of Israel, the creation of these nuclear weapons would be unattainable.

As the weighing scale constantly tips in favour of Israel, America illustrates the double standards it breeds. America has different paradigms and criteria when dealing with the very same issues internationally. This is evident in several war-stricken countries. In Palestine, the indigent and desperate condition of its people is intensified by the American legalization of Israeli actions. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the killing of their people and forced military occupancy endlessly transpires under the alleged reason that America is fighting terrorism. In Iran –who extended its hand of cooperation to IAEA and confirmed its nuclear energy was for peaceful purposes- America continues to exert its power by threatening to impose International sanctions on them. In North Korea, this is evident as well. As a matter of

fact, it was this very reaction by the American administration towards the North Korean nuclear test –and the overlooking of Israel’s nuclear capabilities- that prompted me to write about this week’s piece. It truly makes me wonder how many excuses can fit on the American weighing scale.

It also makes me remember the kind of ‘nuclear weapons’ Yasser Arafat had, which are considered a ‘grave threat’ to the existence of Israel. I do hope that the Iraqi lesson after Vietnam and Afghanistan will shed some light on the Israeli conduct otherwise the American fig leaf would not be enough to cover Israel’s starkness.

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