

# Document Friday: 1974 CIA Estimate Declared, “We believe that Israel already has produced nuclear weapons.”

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Yesterday, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu abruptly announced that he has decided not attend President Obama’s Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, sending Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor in his place. The Washington Post **reported** this was due to concern over “Arab criticism of Israel’s undeclared nuclear arsenal.” Attempting to be topical, I’m reposting this **1974 CIA document** in which the Agency declared, “We believe that Israel already has produced nuclear weapons.”

The Special National Intelligence Estimate, **“Prospects for Further Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”** was originally obtained and **posted** by Archive analysts Jeffery Richelson and Bill Burr. The SNIE was produced after the somewhat unanticipated 1974 Indian “peaceful nuclear explosion” and attempted to estimate the future likelihood that “candidates for the development of nuclear weapons” (including Israel, Taiwan, Japan, Argentina, South Africa, and others) would produce nuclear arsenals.

The CIA stated that it believed Israel had produced nuclear weapons because the Israeli government had acquired “large quantities of uranium, partly by clandestine means,” because of its efforts in uranium enrichment, and because it had made “a large investment in a costly missile system designed to accommodate nuclear warheads.”

Still, the CIA admitted that an Israeli nuclear arsenal “cannot be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt.” The Agency also wisely projected that Israel would **maintain nuclear ambiguity**: “We do not expect the Israelis to provide confirmation of widespread suspicions of their capability, either by nuclear testing or by threats of use, short of a grave threat to the nation’s existence.”

It has **long been speculated** that Israel maintained a nuclear weapons program. A 1999 Defense Intelligence Agency Report **estimated** that Israel had 60 to 80 nuclear weapons in 1999 and would have 65 to 85 by 2020. Israel, like nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, has not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

In addition to reporting the CIA’s take on Israel’s nuclear weapons program, this 1974 SNIE also warned of the further “spread of nuclear weapons,” of terrorist theft of weapons or fissile materials, and of the “acquisition of nuclear weapons by non-governmental entities.” 35 years later, these threats remain. Hopefully, President Obama’s Nuclear Security Summit will make headway confronting them.



*The Israeli Dimona nuclear reactor complex. Photographed by Corona satellite on 11 November 1968.*