**Obama’s dangerous initiative**

New ‘nuke-free’ strategy blurs distinction between West, radical regimes

By Eytan Gilboa

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The attempt to wholly change America’s nuclear policy and the rules of play on the nuclear front is commensurate with President Obama’s “Change” and “Yes, we can” slogans. This attempt may hold far-reaching implications for Israel’s traditional nuclear policy and its significance to our ties with the US.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently revealed, for the first time in history, the number of operational nuclear warheads held by the US: 5,113. America is the first nuclear country to do this. Other states attempt to keep such figures under wraps, while intelligence agencies invest great efforts and resources in eliciting this information.

Why did the Obama Administration choose to publish the figures? And why now?

The move joins previous Obama steps aimed at minimizing nuclear proliferation. The US adopted the recent unusual move in order to convey a determined message: America wants to lead the struggle to prevent the proliferation of weapons and dismantle them, while serving as a personal and national model.

Now, the US expects Russia and other members of the nuclear club to follow in its footsteps, publish information about their own stockpiles, subject their facilities to tighter monitoring, and later agree to the mutual dismantlement of nuclear weapons.

Implications for Israel

The US has always objected to nuclear proliferation for fear that the likelihood of using nukes will grow as more states possess them. Israel was an exception, and the attitude to its nuclear policy was unique.

America preferred to ignore Israel’s nuclear weapons because their development was justified in light of the Holocaust, the military power of Arab states, and their constant threats to destroy the Jewish State.

However, Obama’s new nuclear policy may change America’s traditional stance on Israel’s nukes.

Clinton already expressed her support for the notion of a nuke-free Middle East and the Egyptian initiative to realize this view. For years now, Egypt had been trying to place Israel’s nukes on the global agenda in an effort to reveal Israel’s stockpiles, monitor them, limit them, and dismantle them.

The US curbed these efforts so far, yet at this time it appears that America is willing to accept the Egyptian position and possibly work towards realizing it.

American naiveté

However, Obama’s nuclear strategy is dangerous and problematic. It is premised on a certain degree of naiveté and unfounded idealism. States such as Iran are wholly unimpressed by America’s goodwill and gestures.

The US position completely ignores the weakness of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the institutions tasked with implementing it. Under the NPT, states such as Iraq and Libya developed infrastructure for the production of nuclear weapons. In recent years, Iran has been doing the same.

While the US currently proposes new measures aimed at allowing announced inspections and punishment of rogue states, it’s clear these moves won’t be approved. Conventions are secured through consensus, and it’s enough for states such as China and Iran to resist in order to thwart the required changes.

The new American strategy also blurs the distinction between the very possession of nukes and the nature of the governments holding them. The problem does not have to do with the weapons held by the US, Britain, France, India, or Israel. The main issue has to do with radical, authoritative and violent regimes such as Iran, which threatens to destroy Israel and turn all Mideastern regimes into radical Islamic ones.

A discussion of a nuke-free Middle East means exclusive preoccupation with Israel’s nuclear program. Iran won’t cease its effort to acquire nukes, and the preoccupation with Israel will merely serve Tehran’s aims by diverting some attention away from it.

Egyptian trap

Moreover, the focus on nuclear weapons ignores other types of weapons of mass destruction such as chemical and biological means, which are held by some of Israel’s foes.

The vision of a nuke-free Middle East is an appropriate and worthwhile one, yet it could only be realized after all of Israel’s close and distant neighbors, including Iran, secure stable peace treaties with it, cut back their armies, and eliminate their WMD arsenals.

At this time, the issue of nuclear weapons cannot be separated from the other major issues of war and peace in the Mideast. Should the Obama Administration fall into the Egyptian trap and allow attention to be shifted to Israel’s nuclear programs, we’ll see another focal point of tension in Israel-US relations. Our government will then have to carefully weigh its steps on what is currently the most sensitive international relations issue.

*Professor Eytan Gilboa is a political science and communication lecturer and a senior research associate at the Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University*