**Secrets Bam should keep: U.S. must stop effort to force Israel into nuclear talks**

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The governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency next month are to discuss nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, the target perversely being the one country in the region whose atomic threat is zero.

That is, of course, not Iran, which has been defiantly enriching weapons-grade uranium. It's Israel, which may or may not possess the bomb as a last-ditch deterrent against being overrun by a ring of enemies.

For almost half a century, the U.S. has backed Israel in cloaking its nuclear capabilities in doubt. This strategic ambiguity has enhanced regional stability in that would-be invaders need worry about risking a strike by launching all-out war.

Now, though, in one more break with the principles that have undergirded American-Israeli relations, the Obama administration has fed momentum at the IAEA and at the United Nations for pressuring Israel to reveal its nuclear secrets on the way to forced disarmament, assuming that Israel is, in fact, a nuclear state.

President Obama must dramatically reverse course. He must apply U.S. muscle to push the IAEA into removing scrutiny of "Israeli nuclear capabilities" from its upcoming agenda. And he must extricate America from an attempt to enforce a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Mideast.

Obama has pursued nuclear nonproliferation as a signature thrust of his administration. Halting the spread of nukes is an admirable goal, as is harnessing all the nations of the world into forswearing the possession and use of weapons of mass destruction.

That dream is a long way off. Meanwhile, in the here and now, the facts of life, death and global power-playing demand clear-eyed pragmatism.

For Obama, that means coming to a newfound recognition that going out of a President's way to cut Israel down to a size preferred by its enemies is not the path to peace. That shredding America's five-decade-long support for Israel's nuclear ambiguity will not lead Iran to abandon a defiant march toward nuclear missiles.

Such fantasies succeed only in empowering forces that have, at the least, refused to accept Israel's right to exist and have, at the worst, called for the fiery annihilation of the Jewish state.

They are, in fact, a great gift to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, all of a sudden made Israel's moral peer, all of a sudden able to demand equal treatment.

It is widely accepted that the Israeli government began moving toward nuclear capability under the leadership of its first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, who recognized a truth that is as valid today as it was then: Vastly outnumbered by hostile populations - 7 million against several hundred million - the country needed superior technology to survive.

President Richard Nixon got the point and reached a deal with then-Prime Minister Golda Meir that let Israel proceed as it saw fit, as long as Israel kept its program secret and did not use it for diplomatic leverage. Israel and Nixon's successors kept to the bargain, with many believing that it deterred Saddam Hussein and others from unleashing horrors.

What's certain is that no one in the Mideast - or anywhere else - is remotely concerned about a nuke strike or nuclear bullying by Israel. The same cannot be said about Iran, whose neighbors live in fear of that country's intentions.

The administration disregarded these realities, along with the lessons of history, in applying its theories of nonproliferation to the region. Not only did the U.S. acquiesce in the IAEA's plan to put Israel under the microscope, it also backed a Security Council resolution endorsing a nuke-free Middle East, which is tantamount to a call for Israeli disarmament.

With such a head of steam, it's little wonder that the IAEA's chief has asked leaders of the group's 151 states for ideas on persuading Israel to sign the nuclear nonproliferation treaty.

Obama must put this genie back in the bottle by, to start with, forcing the IAEA to remove Israel from its agenda.

In diplo-speak, Secretary of State Clinton has ventured that conditions for a nuclear-free Middle East "do not yet exist." Never mind that the administration endorsed the idea in the Security Council. She's right - and she needs to hammer the message home with strength and clarity.

When Iran comes into full nuclear compliance, when there is comprehensive peace in the Middle East, that will be the time to ask Israel to reveal and relinquish its arsenal. And only then.