



The Worst-Kept Secret: Israel's Bargain with the Bomb

Avner Cohen

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Israel has made a unique contribution to the nuclear age—it has created (with the tacit support of the United States) a special "bargain" with its bomb. Israel is the only nuclear-armed state that keeps its bomb invisible, unacknowledged, opaque. It will only say that it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East.

The bomb is Israel's collective ineffable—the nation's last taboo. This bargain has a name: in Hebrew, it is called *amimut*, or opacity. By adhering to the bargain, which was born in a secret deal between Richard Nixon and Golda Meir, Israel creates a code of nuclear conduct that encompasses both governmental policy and societal behavior. The bargain lowers the salience of Israel's nuclear weapons, yet it also remains incompatible with the norms and values of liberal democracy. It relies on secrecy and opacity. It infringes on the public right to know and negates the notion of public accountability and oversight, among other offenses.

Author of the critically acclaimed *Israel and the Bomb*, Avner Cohen offers a bold and original study of this politically explosive subject. Along with a fair appraisal of the bargain's strategic merits, Cohen provides a critique of its antidemocratic faults. Arguing that the bargain has become increasingly anachronistic, he calls for a reform in line with domestic democratic values as well as current international nuclear norms. Most important, he believes the old methods will prove inadequate in dealing with a nuclear Iran. Cohen concludes with fresh perspectives on Iran, Israel, and the effort toward global disarmament.

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