



Nuclear Deterrence and Israel's Nuclear Weapons

Objectives:

- To explore the concept of nuclear deterrence and understand why Israel's nuclear arsenal may or may not have prevented conflicts.
- To critically examine the potentially dangerous and destabilising influence of nuclear weapons in general.

Progression:

1. Establish students' prior knowledge about:

- Nuclear weapons
- Mutually Assured Destruction (acronym often used is M.A.D.)

2. Lesson Outlines

These have a PowerPoint presentation to accompany them, a history factsheet giving a timeline of Israel's nuclear weapons program and regional conflicts - and a world map.

3. Follow up

- Background information and research sources.
- Word Bank and Quiz Challenges.

1. Establishing students' knowledge

As a general quick recap this selection of videos are recommended as possible resources. The teacher should use their own judgement as to how many to watch and how extensive a post watch discussion should be:

- [What if We Nuke a City? - YouTube](#) (approx. 9 mins) shows the destructive power of a nuclear bomb
- [Mutually Assured Destruction - YouTube](#) (approx. 3 mins)
- [Mutually Assured Destruction - Nuclear Fallout - YouTube](#) (approx. 9 mins) includes the Cold War and Cuban Missile Crisis.
- [Nuclear Explosions - Vimeo](#) (approx. 3 mins)
- [The Nuclear Weapons Debate - Vimeo](#) (approx. 2 mins)

2. Lesson Outlines

The Concept of Nuclear Deterrence

- **Explanation:** Define what “nuclear deterrent” means – the idea that possessing nuclear weapons prevents others from attacking because of the threat of devastating retaliation. Explain that many countries, including Israel, possess nuclear weapons. States who possess nuclear weapons claim that this deters other states from attacking them.

[Deterrence, threat and credibility in the nuclear age - Youtube](#) (approx. 4mins)

- Despite having nuclear weapons, states that have them have been attacked or drawn into a war. The Falklands War when Argentina attacked the British dependency, the Falkland Islands, is an example.

[The Falklands War - Youtube Short](#) (approx. 1min)

Case Study: Israel's Nuclear Weapons and the Yom Kippur War

- **Background:** Provide an overview of Israel's nuclear program (see History Timeline), including its development and why it has remained unofficial and unconfirmed. Explain that despite Israel's nuclear capability, wars still occurred.
- **The Yom Kippur War:** Introduce the Yom Kippur War (1973), where Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel in a bid to regain lost territory. Discuss how the war unfolded despite Israel's possession of nuclear weapons. It is generally agreed that both countries knew that Israel possessed nuclear weapons.

[Yom Kippur War - YouTube](#) (approx. 3mins)

Exploring the Dangers and Destabilising Influence

- **Discussion Points:**

- **False Sense of Security?** Discuss whether or not having nuclear weapons can create a false sense of security.
The possession of nuclear weapons does not give Israel a sense of security at all, false or real. The public live with an overarching sense of insecurity, despite having nuclear weapons. Poll after poll reveals that Israelis live in a constant state of fear from their neighbours and the possession of nuclear weapons does not lessen that sense of fear. Being in that sense of fear does not of course mean that Israelis want to give up nuclear weapons but equally it contributes nothing to a sense of security. Consider why Israel might want to have nuclear weapons.
- **Regional Tensions:** Explain how Israel's possession of nuclear weapons has led to increased tensions in the Middle East.
This may encourage other countries to develop a nuclear weapons programme. The more countries that have nuclear weapons (nuclear proliferation) the more difficult it is to pursue international nuclear arms treaties.

[What are Iran's Nuclear and Missile Capabilities?](#) cfr.org, Nov. 2024

- **Accidents and Miscalculations:** Highlight the risks of accidents, misunderstandings, or the possibility of nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands, which could have catastrophic consequences.

[The history of the Cuban Missile Crisis - YouTube](#) (approx. 5mins)

- **Escalation** Use a recent example to show how possession of nuclear weapons have not always prevented smaller conflicts or tensions from escalating in different regions.

India and Pakistan could be considered as an example:

[History of India-Pakistan Conflict Explained on Maps - Youtube](#) (approx. 9mins)

Conclusion and Key Takeaway

- **Summarise:** Highlight the key points that nuclear deterrence does not always prevent conflict and that nuclear weapons can increase the risk of war, accidents, and regional instability.

3. **Follow up**

- **Background into the current conflict**

1. Short infographic video about Israel-Palestine [The Israel-Palestine conflict: a brief, simple history - Youtube](#) (approx. 10mins)
2. A 10 minute video history of Israel-Palestine [Rory Stewart Attempts to Explain the History of Israel-Palestine in 10 Minutes - YouTube](#) (approx. 10mins)

- **Word Bank Challenge – below**

- **Quiz Challenge – below ([PowerPoint version also available](#))**

Further suggested resources:

- [Teaching resources - Quakers in Britain](#)
- [Resources - Peace Education Scotland](#)

History Factsheet

Timeline: Israel's Nuclear Weapons Program and Regional Conflicts

1. Late 1940s - Early 1950s: Israel's Nuclear Program Begins

- **1948: Israel is Founded**
Israel officially becomes a country.
- **1952: Israel Starts Exploring Nuclear Technology**
The Israeli Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC) is set up to look into nuclear capabilities.

2. 1956: The Suez Crisis and Alliance with France

- Israel strengthens its relationship with France, gaining access to important nuclear technology and knowledge.

3. 1958-1963: Building Nuclear Infrastructure

- **1958: Construction of the Dimona Reactor**
With French help, Israel secretly starts building the Dimona nuclear reactor in the Negev Desert.
- **1960: U.S. Discovers Dimona**
The United States uncovers the secret project, sparking global interest.
- **1963: Dimona Goes Operational**
The reactor becomes functional, marking a big step toward Israel's nuclear ambitions.

4. 1967: The Six-Day War

- Even though Israel is working on nuclear weapons, it fights and wins the Six-Day War using conventional military forces. This shows that its regular army is strong.

5. 1973: The Yom Kippur War

- Despite the knowledge that Israel had nuclear weapons, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel.
- Israel considers using nuclear weapons but ultimately decides not to. Instead, it relies on conventional military tactics to win the war.

6. 1980s: Growing Nuclear Program and More Conflicts

- **1981: Israel Bombs Iraq's Osirak Nuclear Reactor**
Israel assumes that Iraq's nuclear programme is the first stage of them developing nuclear weapons, as this was how Israel developed their own nuclear arsenal. Israel launches an airstrike on Iraq's nuclear reactor, showing its willingness to use conventional military options instead of nuclear ones.
- **1982: The First Lebanon War**
Israel invades Lebanon.

7. 1986: Mordechai Vanunu Exposes Israel's Nuclear Secrets

- Although generally assumed that Israel had nuclear weapons, former technician Mordechai Vanunu's exposé gives confirmation.

8. 1990s-2000s: Continued Conflicts

- **1991: Gulf War.**
- **2000-2005: Second Intifada (uprising, rebellion)**

9. 2006: The Second Lebanon War

Conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon

10. 2010-Present: Ongoing Conflicts in Gaza and the West Bank

- **2014: Operation Protective Edge**
Israel launches a large military operation in Gaza.
- **2020-Present: Continuing Tensions**
Conflicts in Gaza and the West Bank persist.

Current Status (2025)

- Israel is believed to have 80-90 nuclear warheads but avoids a formal acknowledging this. This is called a policy of nuclear ambiguity. This policy allows Israeli diplomats to avoid any discussion of UN nuclear disarmament initiatives.

Nuclear Weapons and Israel

Israel and neighbouring countries - world map



Map showing Israel (in dark green) and the Israeli-occupied territories (in light green)
By M.Bitton – [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Nuclear Weapons and Israel

Word Bank Challenge

Read an article or watch a documentary about Israel's nuclear weapons program, then complete the passage below by using the words found in the word bank at the end.

Israel has never officially confirmed or denied possessing nuclear weapons, but it is widely believed that the country began its secret nuclear weapons program in the _____. The nuclear facility located in _____ is often cited as the centre of Israel's nuclear development. This program is thought to have begun with support from _____, which provided assistance in the 1950s and 1960s.

The suspected number of nuclear warheads that Israel possesses today is estimated to be around _____. Unlike other nuclear-armed countries, Israel follows a policy of _____, meaning it neither confirms nor denies its nuclear arsenal. The weapons are believed to be stored at different _____ sites across the country.

The whistleblower _____ played a key role in bringing Israel's nuclear program to international attention in the 1980s. He worked as a technician at the nuclear plant and leaked photographs and information to a British newspaper. As a result, he was later _____ by Israeli agents and brought back to Israel, where he faced a trial and was imprisoned.

The debate over Israel's nuclear weapons program remains a highly _____ topic in international politics. While some view it as a vital _____ strategy for a country surrounded by potential threats, others argue that it adds to the _____ in an already unstable region.

Word Bank: 1960s, Dimona, France, 80-90, ambiguity, undisclosed, Mordechai Vanunu, abducted, controversial, deterrence, tensions.

Quiz Challenge

1. **True or False:** Israel is an officially declared nuclear weapons state.
 - A) True
 - B) False
2. **Which of the following statements is true about Israel's nuclear weapons policy?**
 - A) Israel has openly admitted to having nuclear weapons.
 - B) Israel follows a policy of "nuclear ambiguity," neither confirming nor denying possession of nuclear weapons.
 - C) Israel has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
 - D) Israel uses nuclear weapons regularly in conflicts.
3. **What is the main goal of having nuclear weapons according to many countries?**
 - A) To use them in battle
 - B) To scare other countries
 - C) As a means of deterrence to prevent wars
 - D) To generate electricity
4. **Despite Israel's possible possession of nuclear weapons, which of the following wars still took place in the region? (Choose all that apply)**
 - A) Yom Kippur War (1973)
 - B) Lebanon War (1982)
 - C) Gulf War (1990-1991)
 - D) Israel-Gaza conflicts (2008, 2014)
5. **Which of the following countries possesses nuclear weapons?**
 - a) India
 - b) Israel
 - c) Pakistan
 - d) All of the above
6. **Which of the following countries do not possess nuclear weapons?**
 - a) Brazil
 - b) Australia
 - c) Ireland
 - d) all of the above

Nuclear Weapons and Israel

Quiz Challenge (contd.)

7. **Which two nuclear-armed countries have fought multiple wars over the region of Kashmir?**
 - a) India and China
 - b) Israel and Egypt
 - c) India and Pakistan
 - d) Pakistan and Afghanistan
8. **The Yom Kippur War was fought between Israel and which two countries in 1973?**
 - a) Syria and Jordan
 - b) Egypt and Syria
 - c) Lebanon and Jordan
 - d) Iraq and Iran
9. **In what year did India and Pakistan conduct their first nuclear tests?**
 - a) 1965
 - b) 1974
 - c) 1998
 - d) 2002

True or False Questions:

10. **True or False:** The possession of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan has completely stopped all military conflict between the two countries.
11. **True or False:** Israel has fought multiple wars since it developed nuclear weapons, including the Yom Kippur War.
12. **True or False:** Nuclear weapons were used in the Yom Kippur War.

Nuclear Weapons and Israel

Quiz Challenge (contd.)

ANSWERS

1. False
2. B
3. C
4. All

5. d
6. d
7. c
8. b
9. c

10. False
11. True
12. False