

FROM MICHAEL LATHAM M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Dear Prime Minister,

I have been reading with interest and great approval, the official text of the Press Conference which you gave in Kuwait on the 27th September, and I was particularly pleased to see what you had to say about the P.L.O. This is, and remains, a terrorist organisation and it remains committed to the destruction of the State of Israel, however much they may choose to deny it. There are very large numbers of public statements, many of them very recent, to that effect, and if you are short of examples to offer at a future Press conference, I will gladly supply you with many !

Could I perhaps refer to your "total condemnation" of the Israeli raid on the nuclear reactor in Irak. I would like you to consider, if you would be so kind, the attached document published by the Britain Israel Public Affairs Committee. This puts, I would suggest, a rather different perspective on the matter, and it always ought perhaps to be remembered that Irak is still officially at war with Israel, never having signed an Armistice agreement. I do think, perhaps, you ought to ask for the statements in this document to be checked, because if they are correct they do explain very clearly why Israel felt that her basic security was in danger. Foreign Office Ministers have made much of the fact that Irak has signed a non proliferation Treaty but this document would seem to suggest that its signature is, to put it mildly, of limited value.

Yours sincerely,  
Michael Latham

The Right Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher M.P.  
No. 10 Downing Street,  
London S.W.1.

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# IRAQ'S NUCLEAR INTENTIONS — ISRAEL WAS RIGHT

## The Israeli raid on the nuclear reactor near Baghdad

Just over a month after the Israelis destroyed the Iraqi nuclear reactor near Baghdad, the International Atomic Energy Agency revealed that it had long suspected that Iraq's nuclear intentions were not exclusively peaceful (*Financial Times* 13/7/81). Even before the raid, the agency's headquarters in Vienna had proposed to inspect the Iraqi reactor every two weeks, an unprecedented frequency, and to install an automatic camera to watch the core of the reactor to record any tamperings between inspections.

The news that Israel had attacked and apparently destroyed the reactor known as Osirak, in June 1981, produced immediate and widespread criticism from politicians and press around the world.

However, as time went by and the facts became clearer, this predictable reaction moderated. In the weeks which followed, even more evidence to justify Israel's action emerged. But by then the raid had been removed from the front pages and in-depth comment was being reserved for more topical events.

This was a pity because we now know that the Israeli government were not the only ones who were extremely anxious about Iraq's nuclear plans. Indeed it becomes increasingly obvious that Israel's actions, whilst publicly condemned, were privately welcomed by many of those even among the Arab countries, who are most intimately concerned with stability in the Middle East and with nuclear proliferation.

The Osirak was the only nuclear reactor with a power of more than 50 thermal megawatts (it has 70) in a non-nuclear or non-advanced country. It was built for the Iraqis by the French and was a copy of the reactor built in 1966 at Saclay in France. In the view of one Massachusetts Institute of Technology specialist (*International Herald Tribune*, June 10, 1981) 'You use a reactor like that either for metallurgical research or for making plutonium. Since there's no metallurgical industry in Iraq, it has to be for plutonium'.

And plutonium is only required for producing bombs. Furthermore, Iraq had been buying raw uranium (*Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 1981) which is only useful for an Osirak-type reactor if it is being used to produce plutonium for weapons.

- Why does Iraq wish to pursue an energy policy based on nuclear material when it has a plentiful supply of oil?
- Why does it want to move into the nuclear sphere when it has hardly any science-based industry?
- Why did Iraq insist on having weapons grade-enriched uranium for its reactor?
- Why did it purchase very large quantities of uranium from Portugal, Niger and Libya?
- Why did it arrange with an Italian contractor to build three hot-cell laboratories near Baghdad when they would be unsuitable for peaceful purposes?
- Why is the research programme of Iraq's nuclear reactor not published?

Most important of all — why does the world not ask these questions and express anxiety that a regime as reactionary, repressive and unstable as Iraq's, might be manufacturing nuclear weapons? The answer given to this one is — because Iraq has signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty and its reactor is therefore subject to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

But it turns out that these inspections consist of an audit of records of the purchase of fissionable material, an examination of operational records and a check on the content of the core of the reactor. In theory IAEA inspectors must be given access to everything that concerns fissionable materials. In practice, they only visit what has been declared. Thus any reactors built secretly on other sites escape inspection completely.

The Agency acknowledges that it cannot compel a government to agree to inspections; they have to be by mutual agreement. Thus there are no international standards for inspection. Arrangements differ among all the 114 signatories of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

**The IAEA had made five inspectors available to inspect the Baghdad reactor. One, an American, was banned by the Iraqis. He later resigned from the Agency saying its system of inspection was inadequate. The Iraqis chose two inspectors, one from the USSR, one from Hungary, and insisted they should only inspect the reactor at night by torchlight.**

The Agency report, published in July 1981, expressed concern at Iraq's demands for new fuels not essential for the work they said the reactor was doing, at its refusal of a lower grade of uranium when that was all it needed for peaceful purposes and that it had arranged the building of three hot-cell laboratories with an Italian contractor.

Before the Baghdad reactor was destroyed, a team of French scientists had sent a report to President Mitterand and Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, saying that they were convinced that the Iraqis had secretly modified the Osirak reactor to produce plutonium outside international controls. They said the Iraqis could produce one nuclear bomb each year and questioned the wisdom of the French supplying enriched uranium. It is certain that Israel was aware of all this long before it was made public.

**The evidence pointed to the preparation of a nuclear bomb by Iraq. For whom could it be intended if not for Israel with whom Iraq was at war? Inspection under the Non-Proliferation Treaty has frequently been condemned as inadequate.**

Israel decided to destroy the reactor before it was loaded. Another 6-8 weeks and the fall-out from an attack would have killed thousands of people living in and near Baghdad. For Israel the only strategy for survival is a pre-emptive strategy. The International Atomic Energy Agency has conceded that the Israelis saved many lives by striking when they did.