

Britain and Israel's nuclear bomb

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Recently released papers show that, unknown to ministers at the time, Britain provided hundreds of shipments of nuclear materials to Israel in the 1960s. A Jewish civil servant played a vital role in ensuring these shipments took place. This story reminds us that things may be happening behind the scenes in relation to the purpose of God of which we are unaware.

IN DANIEL 10 the angel says to Daniel: "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia" (v. 13). This gives us an insight into the work of the angels. For a period of twenty-one days the angels had been working behind the scenes in order to further the purpose of God. It had taken the intervention of the Angel Michael for the desired end to be accomplished.

Although Daniel was unaware of the details of what was happening, he had the faith to know "that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that He appointeth over it whomsoever He will" (5:21). Elisha had the eye of faith to see the "horses and chariots of fire" (2 Kgs. 6:17), even though they were invisible to the natural eye. We too must have the faith to believe that, through His angels, God is working amongst the nations behind the scenes.

It is not possible, of course, for us to say for sure in what way angels are, and have been, involved in directing the nations of the world today. Daniel knew, because he was told directly by an angel. We do not have such revelations, so we must be careful in making claims about angelic intervention. However, what we can do is marvel at the amazing way things are developing in the time of the end and have the faith to know that truly the angels are working to further God's purpose. One such amazing thing which has recently come to light is the way Britain helped Israel to become a nuclear power.

Nuclear power

Israel became a nation in 1948. This itself was a miracle. But within twenty years, even more amazingly, it became a nuclear power. How

did this come about? Israel had help from other nations, including the French. But a journalistic investigation by the BBC has recently shown that Britain played a vital role in helping Israel achieve nuclear status. The details have been reported by the BBC producer Meirion Jones in the *New Statesman*.¹

During the 1950s, Israel, with the help of the French, built a nuclear reactor and reprocessing plant at Dimona in the Negev desert. While Harold Macmillan was prime minister, Britain supplied heavy water for use in this plant, the first delivery occurring in June 1959. The sale of the heavy water was ostensibly to Norway, but the Norwegians simply acted as go-betweens, carrying contracts between the two parties. During the premiership of Harold Wilson in the 1960s, Britain sold Israel small amounts of plutonium that could be used by Israel to research and develop a bomb. In addition, "Britain also sold Israel a whole range of other exotic chemicals, including uranium-235, beryllium and lithium-6, which are used in atom bombs and even hydrogen bombs".² In fact "Britain made *hundreds* of other secret shipments of nuclear materials to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s".³

This involvement of Britain has been brought to light by journalists getting access to previously top-secret papers, which they obtained through the United Kingdom's Freedom of Information Act. Yet, as these papers reveal, it was not a case of government ministers at the time suppressing the information about the shipments. Remarkably, ministers were apparently unaware of what was happening. Tony Benn was the technology minister in 1966. Nuclear power was part of his responsibility. When interviewed recently about the shipments he is quoted as saying, "I'm not only surprised . . . I'm shocked".⁴ So who was behind these shipments? One of the key figures was a civil servant called Michael Israel Michaels.

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1. Jones, M. (2006), "Britain's dirty secret", *New Statesman*, 13 March, pp. 18-21; <http://www.newstatesman.com/200603130011>.
 2. *Ibid.* p. 18.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 19.
 4. *Ibid.*

PICTURE: © Israel National Photo Collection



Houses under construction in Dimona. It was at this development town in the Negev that Israel built its nuclear facilities.

The Jew behind the scenes

Michael Israel Michaels was a British Jew who worked as a senior official in the science ministry and later worked under the technology minister, Tony Benn. For fourteen years he was also Britain's representative on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Michaels sought to portray Israel's intentions as peaceful. For example, in 1961 he visited Israel following an invitation from the head of Israeli nuclear research, Ernst David Bergmann. During that visit he also met the prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, and the deputy defence minister, Shimon Peres. British defence and intelligence staff felt sure that Israel was developing nuclear weapons. But when he returned to Britain, Michaels reported back that Israel's intentions were peaceful. The following year the Dimona plant became operational, using the heavy water supplied by Britain, but Michaels continued to claim Israel's intention was not to develop a nuclear weapon.

As well as seeking to portray Israel in the best possible light, Michaels was also not afraid to use his assertiveness to ensure Britain supplied Israel with nuclear materials. This was illustrated in 1966, when the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority asked permission to export to Israel ten milligrams of plutonium. Following advice from the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office blocked the request. Michaels apparently reacted with fury, pointing out the small amount involved and the fact that Israel would pay some other supplier if Britain refused. He persuaded the

Foreign Office to change their mind, and the plutonium was sent to Israel. Although only a small amount, it was invaluable for researching and developing a bomb.

According to Meirion Jones, "The small sample of plutonium could have shaved months off the development time of the Israeli atomic bomb in the run-up to the Six Day War".⁵ He argues that the two, albeit crude, nuclear weapons that Israel had by this time gave it "an insurance policy" in case the war went badly. In short, it gave its government the confidence to prosecute the daring tactics it employed during that war.

Conclusion

It is incredible that, behind the scenes, without government ministers knowing, Britain was supplying Israel with nuclear materials. Moreover, at the heart of this operation was a Jewish civil servant. In the BBC Television programme which reported this story, a retired defence analyst, Peter Kelly, was asked why Michaels had not apparently perceived that the Dimona plant was being used to develop nuclear weapons. He replied simply, "Well, his middle name was Israel".⁶

This tale provides a salutary warning for us as watchmen in these last days. No amount of searching newspapers or listening to the words of politicians would have revealed these events as they were happening. Not even the politicians themselves knew what was happening. Who knows what might be happening at the present time without us knowing? What we do know is that the angels are at work, preparing the world for the return of Christ. And when that event happens, Israel will learn to rely, not on a sympathetic civil servant called Michael working for a foreign country, but on the living God and His son, a great prince: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people" (Dan. 12:1).

5. *Ibid.* p. 21.

6. Report by Michael Crick on *Newsnight*, BBC 2, 9 March 2006.