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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Revealed: the secrets of Israel's nuclear arsenal

INSIGHT

THE SECRETS of a subterranean factory engaged in the manufacture of Israeli nuclear weapons have been uncovered by The Sunday Times Insight team.

Hidden beneath the Negev desert, the factory has been producing atomic warheads for the last 20 years. Now it has almost certainly begun manufacturing thermonuclear weapons, with yields big enough to destroy entire cities.

Information about Israel's capacity to manufacture the bomb come from the testimony of Mordechai Vanunu, a 31-year-old Israeli who worked as a nuclear technician for nearly 10 years in Machon 2 - a top secret, underground bunker built to provide the vital components necessary for weapons production at Dimona, the Israeli nuclear research establishment.

Vanunu's evidence has surprised nuclear weapons experts who were approached by Insight to verify its accuracy because it shows that Israel does not just have the atom bomb - which has been long suspected - but that it has become a major nuclear power.

Vanunu's testimony and pictures, which have been scrutinised by nuclear experts on both sides of the Atlantic, show that Israel has developed the sophisticated and highly classified techniques needed to build up a formidable nuclear arsenal.



Pictured for the first time in detail: Israel's nuclear bomb plant is built deep beneath the Negev desert, having been operating for more than 20 years

The plant is equipped with French plutonium extracting technology, which transformed Dimona from a civilian research establishment to a bomb production facility. Plutonium production rates amount to 40 kilograms a year, enough to build 10 bombs. In the past 10 years, Israel has added

estimated strength of Israel's nuclear arsenal. The scientists include Theodore Taylor, one of the world's most experienced nuclear weapons experts. He was taught by Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb, and worked on America's first bomb designs. He later went on to head the Pentagon's atomic weapons

consist with an Israeli capacity to produce 10 nuclear weapons a year that are significantly smaller, lighter and more efficient than the first types of weapons developed by Russia, America, Britain, France or China.

Another scientist who authenticated the evidence uncovered by Insight is Dr Frank Barnaby, a nuclear physicist who worked at the British

plant, which he quotes exactly confirm the quantities of plutonium that were being made. Vanunu says that, despite tight security, he was able to smuggle a camera into Machon 2 and take more than 60 photographs. Insight debriefed him for four weeks and invited Vanunu to interview Vanunu in an attempt to find scientific flaws in his story. "His de-or-

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Inside Dimona: full story pages 2 & 3

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