

New satellite photos show clearer view of Israeli nuclear facility, reveal major project underway

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Recent satellite photo from Planet Labs Inc. shows construction at the Shimon Peres Negev nuclear arms factory near the city of Dimona, Israel. (Photo:AP)

Washington, February 28 (RHC)-- New satellite photos show a clearer view of a secretive nuclear arms factory of the Israeli regime, which is the only possessor of atomic bombs in the Middle East, revealing that the site is undergoing what appears to be the biggest construction project in decades.

According to the Associated Press, a dig about the size of a soccer field now sits only meters from the aging reactor at the Shimon Peres Negev nuclear factory, whose purpose is believed to be the production of nuclear materials for Israel's nuclear bomb program. The nuclear facility is located near the city of Dimona.

What Tel Aviv "is doing at this secret nuclear weapons plant is something for the Israeli regime to come clean about," the AP quoted Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Washington-based Arms Control Association, as saying.

Kimball indicated that Israel may want to produce more tritium, a relatively faster-decaying radioactive byproduct used to boost the explosive yield of some nuclear warheads. It also could want fresh plutonium "to replace or extend the life of warheads already in the Israeli nuclear arsenal," he added.

Last week, the International Panel on Fissile Materials (IPFM), a group of independent nuclear experts from 17 countries, noted it had seen "significant new construction" at the nuclear site through satellite photos.

The construction had "expanded and appears to be actively underway with multiple construction vehicles present," the IPFM reported, adding, however, that the purpose of the construction was not known.

New satellite images attained by the AP through Planet Labs Inc. provide a clearer view of the site, which shows that in the southwest of the reactor, workers have dug a hole about 150 meters long and 60 meters wide. Some 2 kilometers west of the reactor, boxes are stacked in two rectangular holes that appear to have concrete bases.

Under its policy of nuclear ambiguity, the Israeli regime neither confirms nor denies having nuclear weapons. However, the regime is widely believed to be one of only nine nuclear-armed countries in the world.

Israel is among the four countries that have never joined the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which aims to stop the spread of nuclear arms. At the same time, Tel Aviv has repeatedly called for international action against Iran's nuclear program, which has been consistently verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to be of peaceful nature, unlike that of Israel which is not under the IAEA's inspection.

In a tweet last week, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif referred to the reports about Israel's activities at Dimona, which he described as the region's "only nuclear bomb factory." Directly addressing the leaders of the U.S., France, Britain and Germany as well as the IAEA, Zarif blasted their hypocrisy when dealing with the Israeli regime's nuclear activities.

"Gravely concerned?" Zarif wrote, reminding them of their hypocritical expression of "concerns" over Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program. "Concerned? A little? Care to comment?" the chief Iranian diplomat added.

In an exclusive interview with Press TV on Sunday, Zarif said while the Israeli regime is allowed to go ahead with such non-conventional activities, any talk about concerns about Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program is "nonsense." "It's hypocrisy," he said. "Because if they were concerned about non-proliferation, Israel is not a member of the NPT; it's proliferator number one."

Jeffrey Lewis, a professor teaching nonproliferation issues at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, hinted that Israel could be trying to divert attention from its nuclear activity at Dimona by raising the alarm over Iran's nuclear program.

"If you're Israel and you are going to have to undertake a major construction project at Dimona that will draw attention, that's probably the time that you would scream the most about the Iranians," Lewis said.

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