

WHAT MUST BE SAID

Why do I say: Israel's atomic power endangers world peace? Because what must be said may be too late tomorrow

By [Günter Grass](#)

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

WHAT MUST BE SAID

Why have I kept silent, held back so long,
on something openly practised in
war games, at the end of which those of us
who survive will at best be footnotes?

It's the alleged right to a first strike
that could destroy an Iranian people
subjugated by a loudmouth
and gathered in organized rallies,
because an atom bomb may be being
developed within his arc of power.

Yet why do I hesitate to name
that other land in which
for years – although kept secret –
a growing nuclear power has existed
beyond supervision or verification,
subject to no inspection of any kind?

This general silence on the facts,
before which my own silence has bowed,

seems to me a troubling, enforced lie,
leading to a likely punishment
the moment it's broken:
the verdict "Anti-semitism" falls easily.

But now that my own country,
brought in time after time
for questioning about its own crimes,
profound and beyond compare,
has delivered yet another submarine to Israel

(in what is purely a business transaction,
though glibly declared an act of reparation)
whose speciality consists in its ability
to direct nuclear warheads toward
an area in which not a single atom bomb
has yet been proved to exist, its feared
existence proof enough, I'll say what must be said.

But why have I kept silent till now?
Because I thought my own origins,
tarnished by a stain that can never be removed,
meant I could not expect Israel, a land
to which I am, and always will be, attached,
to accept this open declaration of the truth.

Why only now, grown old,
and with what ink remains, do I say:
Israel's atomic power endangers
an already fragile world peace?

Because what must be said
may be too late tomorrow;
and because – burdened enough as Germans –
we may be providing material for a crime
that is foreseeable, so that our complicity
will not be expunged by any
of the usual excuses.

And granted: I've broken my silence
because I'm sick of the West's hypocrisy;
and I hope too that many may be freed
from their silence, may demand
that those responsible for the open danger
we face renounce the use of force,
may insist that the governments of
both Iran and Israel allow an international authority
free and open inspection of
the nuclear potential and capability of both.

No other course offers help
to Israelis and Palestinians alike,
to all those living side by side in enmity
in this region occupied by illusions,
and ultimately, to all of us.

[Günter Grass](#)

The English translation was published by the Guardian.

Translated by Breon Mitchell. You can read the poem in [the original German here](#).

This poem was amended on 10 and 11 April 2012 after it was revised by the translator. This was further amended on 13 April 2012 to include a link to the original poem in German.

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