By Karl Grossman

The just-announced proposal of Israel National Infrastructure Minister Uzi Landau for Israel to build a nuclear power plant makes absolutely no sense economically, militarily, environmentally and for the health of the people of Israel.

“Building a nuclear reactor to produce electricity will allow Israel to develop energy independence,” said Landau last week.

Economically, the cost of a nuclear power plant is now out of sight—between $12 billion and $15 billion for a plant. As a result, “no private money anywhere in the world is being used to build new nuclear plants,” states Michael Mariotte, executive director of the Nuclear Information & Resource Service (www.nirs.org). Huge government subsidies are required. Indeed, President Obama recently proposed a $54.5 billion loan guarantee fund to have new nuclear plants constructed here because Wall Street is reluctant to invest money in the dangerous and extremely expensive technology. That’s seen by the nuclear industry as only a fraction of what it needs in taxpayer subsidy. It has been supporting legislation promoted by Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut to provide ten times that—$544 billion for new nuclear power plant development.

The total budget last year for the Israel Defense Forces was $13.3 billion.

Is the equivalent of that money to be blown on one nuclear power plant?

And, then, what about other national priorities—including defense?

“Nuclear is incredibly expensive,” says Amory Lovins, a physicist and chairman of the Rocky Mountain Institute (www.rmi.org). “Wall Street is not putting a penny of private capital
into the industry…It’s uneconomic. It costs, for example, about three times as much as wind power, which is booming.”

And heading for cost competitiveness with nuclear power is solar power—at which Israel excels. Some 80 percent of homes in Israel are equipped with solar thermal panels to heat water. Israel has been a world leader in solar technology.

And now it is focusing on using the sun to produce electricity—through solar photovoltaic panels. Last year, ZenithSolar, an Israel start-up company, put into operation its first “solar farm.” The concentrated photovoltaic system at the ZenithSolar site was developed by Professor David Faiman, chairman of the Department of Solar Energy and Environmental Physics at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. It converts more than 70 percent of incoming solar energy into electricity as compared to industry norms of 10 to 25 percent efficiency. Israeli President Shimon Peres, in cutting the ceremonial ribbon at Kibbutz Kvutzat Yavne, where the farm is located, said: “Israel has the capability to become the leading country in the promotion of alternative energy technologies. We have the brain power and the ability to do this.”

And this it should do—not waste its resources on the dead-end of nuclear power.

Militarily, for Israel to build a nuclear power plant is creating a sitting duck for its many enemies. A country—or terrorist organization—hostile to Israel need not put together an atomic bomb, as we fear Iran is doing, to bring nuclear destruction to Israel. It need only use a heavy weapon or an aircraft to pierce the concrete containment of the proposed plant and cause a core meltdown or nuclear runaway and bring nuclear devastation to Israel.

This is not giving away any secret. Nuclear power plants are “pre-deployed weapons of mass destruction,” says Paul Gunter, reactor specialist with the organization Beyond Nuclear (www.beyonddnuclear.org). There have been numerous reports of al-Qaeda considering—and
training—for some time to attack a U.S. nuclear plant. Last week’s revelation that al-Qaeda member Sharif Mobley of New Jersey, seized in Yemen, who worked between 2002 and 2008 in six U.S. nuclear plants (in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland) punctuated that issue. As the Associated Press reported: “Authorities are investigating whether he had access to sensitive information or materials that would be useful to terrorists.”

In the danger-fraught Mideast, Iran would not need a nuclear weapon to wreak atomic havoc on Israel—if Israel builds a nuclear plant.

Israel has a nuclear facility already, at Dimona—long said to be the source of fuel for Israeli nuclear weapons—and Iran has spoken about hitting Dimona. But Dimona is small compared to a modern nuclear power plant which holds inside it a thousand times the radioactivity of an atomic bomb. Israel also has an even smaller research reactor at Nahal Soreq near Tel Aviv.

Environmentally, nuclear power is a senseless. The nuclear industry is seeking to “revive” nuclear power with the argument that the plants don’t emit greenhouse gases and thus don’t contribute to global warming. But what you are not supposed to know is that the overall nuclear “chain” or “cycle”—including uranium mining and milling, conversion, enrichment, fuel fabrication and the disposition of radioactive waste, and so on—has significant greenhouse gas emissions.

As the Nuclear Information & Resource Service notes in its report Nuclear Power Can’t Stop Climate Change, “such claims fail to account for the entire nuclear fuel chain. For instance, the nuclear industry conveniently omits the fact that the nuclear fuel chain emits more CO2 than most of the real-world sustainable options... Wind and solar, by comparison, are virtually greenhouse-gas free.” Mariotte of NIRS says renewable energy technologies here today are the
“safer, faster and cheaper way” to deal with global warming. “Why not go safer, faster and cheaper when you have a choice?”

Where is Israel going to get the water to cool a nuclear plant? Landau spoke of the nuclear plant being placed in the northern Negev desert. A nuclear power plant needs hundreds of thousands of gallons of water a minute as coolant flowing in and out of it to keep the atomic reaction in check. That amount of water is not available in the northern Negev desert—indeed, it’s barely available anywhere in Israel, a nation facing serious challenges with its water supply.

And what about the nuclear waste—the hotly radioactive poisons produced constantly in a nuclear plant and needing thereafter to be isolated from life for up to millions of years or they will destroy life?

Is Israel to become the land of milk and honey—and radioactive waste?

As to public health, a nuclear plant accident is not needed for a plant to impact on public health. Nuclear power plants all have “routine emissions”—which have consequences to people who live miles away. The Radiation and Public Health Project (www.radiation.org) has long documented how these emissions cause elevated rates of cancer.

As Dr. Samuel Epstein, professor emeritus of Environmental and Occupational Medicine at the University of Illinois of Chicago, has written: “There is another dirty little secret the nuclear industry doesn’t want you to know…Every day reactors routinely release a portion of radioactive chemicals into local air and water—the same chemicals found in atomic bomb tests. They enter human bodies through breathing and the food chain.

And if there is a major accident allowing all the poisons in a nuclear plant to get out in one fell swoop—what a disaster! This is underlined in a book just published by the New York Academy of Sciences, Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the
Environment. Written by a team of scientists led by noted Russian biologist Dr. Alexey Yablokov, using health data that have become available since the 1986 accident, it concludes that the fatality total “from April 1986 to the end of 2004 from the Chernobyl catastrophe was estimated at 985,000 additional [cancer] deaths.” This is in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and other countries where Chernobyl’s poisons fell. The toll, they relate, continues to rise.

A Chernobyl-scale accident in Israel could be devastating to people throughout much of the tiny nation and leave a good portion of the Israel uninhabitable for millennia.

Uzi Landau holds a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in systems analysis. He is on the fringe politically—originally a Likud member, in 2008 he joined the Yisrael Beiteinu party of Avigdor Lieberman, the controversial figure who is now foreign affairs minister. Lieberman and Landau got their positions as part of a deal with Likud.

That arrangement will eventually pass.

The deadly and unnecessary threat to life if a nuclear power plant is built in Israel will not pass. It must be stopped and Israel be a light to other nations in the use of safe, clean, renewable energy technologies..

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Karl Grossman, professor of journalism at the State University of New York/College at Old Westbury is the author of Cover Up: What You Are Not Supposed to Know About Nuclear Power and other books on nuclear technology and has hosted and written many TV programs on the subject. He has given presentations around the world about the dangers of atomic power.