



SOFIMUN
Sofia International Model United Nations

Edition: 1/2008
Period: 20-27 July 2008
Location: Sofia, Bulgaria

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CHAIRPERSON:
HAYK HAKOBYAN & ISKREN CEKOV

**TOPIC: (B) – NUCLEAR WEAPONS
PROLIFERATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

BACKGROUND GUIDE





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Topic B: Nuclear weapons proliferation in the Middle East - summary



Middle East has become a centre of attention of international and regional political affairs. Ever since the inception of Israel, the region has been in continuous turmoil and witnessed six official Arabo-Israeli wars and continuous regional aggression and military provocation. To date, the Israeli-Arab question of statehood and sovereignty remains unclear. The situation in the Middle East is further complicated by Iranian nuclear ambitions and continuous armed conflicts in Iraq and intermittent military interventions in Syria and Lebanon. Israel, the only non-Arab and non-Muslim country in the region, is currently counted among unofficial nuclear powers, non-signatories of NPT. This state of affairs is seen as unjust and undesired by its members, many of which have cherished or cherish a notion of developing a nuclear capacity.

Most recent events on this front included unilateral and unsolicited bombing of a site in Syria by Israeli Air Force claimed to be a hotbed of Syria nuclear programme. Iran's ambitions and its defiance to all UN SC resolutions has been a significant factor in escalating the entire nuclear issue in the ME region and raising stakes for the concerned countries and, increasingly, independent parties – Hezbollah, al Qaeda as possible candidates – for developing or obtaining nuclear weapons or development capacity thereof.

The few prior proposals of creating a nuclear free Middle East have led so far nowhere and it is not clear whether there is going to be a possible political solution to it.

Topic B: Nuclear weapons proliferation in the Middle East – background guide



The first proposal for regional denuclearization of the Middle East was advanced in Israel as early as 1962. In 1957, six members of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission had resigned following Israel's decision to develop nuclear weapons, and two of them had formed the Committee for Denuclearization of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was this committee that in April 1962 first publicly called for the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East.

The regional denuclearization initiative took concrete shape in the Middle East in the aftermath of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Aware of how close Israel had come to using the nuclear weapons in the war, and the demonstration of how close the then two superpowers could be



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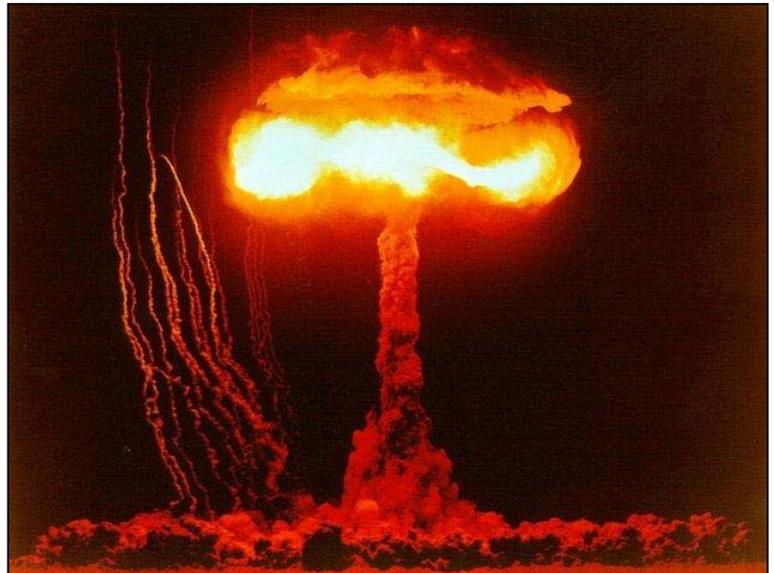
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drawn to the region, Egypt and Iran, who had close relations at that time, proposed in the United Nations that a nuclear weapon-free zone be established in the Middle East.

In the twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly, "Establishment of a Nuclear-Free Zone in the Region of the Middle East" was included mainly at the behest of Iran and was then joined by Egypt. Intense negotiations between Egypt and Iran resulted in bilateral understanding between both the countries to change the title of the item from "Establishment of a Nuclear-free Zone" to "Establishment of a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone." Both countries had agreed that the thrust of the initiative should be directed against the dangers of nuclear weapons and should not hamper the quest for the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

For the Arabs, Israel's nuclear monopoly presents an insurmountable challenge. The destructive capacity of these weapons, uncertainty regarding the circumstances that might lead Israel to use these weapons and the consequent nuclear blackmail that the Arab states were exposed to constituted the threat. The different nuclear policies pursued by the Arab states are basically the reflections of their particular political, social and economic circumstances. Iraq was perhaps the only state that was developing the deterrent, including against Israel. Egypt was perhaps the only other regional state that considered developing nuclear weapons in response albeit for a brief period in the 1960s. Its decision to join the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1980 closed the option forever. Iran may have thought of the deterrent against Israel, but Gulf War realities could not but have turned its attention to Iraq also. Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Syria refrained from joining the nuclear club.



Israel, however, did not become a party to the NPT. Its continuing grounds for not signing the treaty are based on lack of confidence in the NPT's capacity to provide adequate security guarantees, concerns about its provisions to withdraw after only three months' notice and concerns regarding inspection and verification procedures.

The resolution on a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East became a regular feature with minor changes in nuances. The First UN Special Session on Disarmament in 1978 approved a final document by consensus. There was no reference in it to the NPT. From 1979, after the Iranian revolution and a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, the latter decided to sponsor the resolution alone. On December 11, 1979, the UN General Assembly also adopted a resolution—Resolution 34/89—put forward by Iraq, which sought preparation of a study on Israeli nuclear armament.

In October 1980, Israel put forward its own draft, but dropped it soon. In 1991, Egypt suggested that the UN Secretary General distribute to members of the Arab League, Israel, and Iran, a questionnaire to solicit their views regarding the modalities for a Middle East nuclear weapon-free zone, including its geographical extent.



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The main difference between the Israeli and Egyptian texts was the mechanism by which an NWFZ should be established in the Middle East. The Egyptian draft resolutions did not elaborate a mechanism for such establishment or even suggest that a formal agreement to create such an NWFZ should be negotiated and signed by the region's states. Rather, they implied that the Middle East should simply comply with the stipulations of the announced zone." The Egyptian proposal also did not define the obligations that these states would be taking towards each other: instead, it referred to their commitment towards the zone. Egypt did recognize that "efforts aimed at redressing the threats posed by the nuclear dimensions of the arms race would, without doubt, be facilitated by the resolution of the political problems in the region and vice-versa." But it rejected the linkage between the two, arguing that arms control cannot wait for peace.



In contrast to Egypt's nuclear weapon-free zone proposal, the Israeli proposal emphasized the need to negotiate the terms of such a zone. Israel's focus on the negotiation mechanism may have resulted from the conviction that Israel should not surrender the deterrent effect of its nuclear potential unless Arab acceptance of Israel's existence in the region is manifested in a willingness to negotiate with the Jewish state. Such willingness was regarded as a test of Arab states' intentions, and the negotiation process was seen as an essential part of the efforts to build mutual confidence among the region's states without which a nuclear weapon-free zone could not be established.

To date, no universally applicable or acceptable compromise has been found. It remains to be seen, in view of all ongoing regional conflicts and frictions, whether a political solution will be possible to agree upon by all regional powers and involved parties.



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Suggested Reading and Additional Sources

Topic B: Nuclear weapons proliferation in the Middle East

1. GlobalSecurity: [MIDDLE EAST NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION, NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE ZONE SUBJECT OF FIRST COMMITTEE DRAFT TEXTS.](#)
2. GlobalSecurity: [National Intelligence Estimate: Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities, November 2007](#)
3. GlobalSecurity: [STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND DETERRENCE, November 2005](#)
4. BBC News: [Iran nuclear crisis refuses to go quiet , May 2008](#)
5. BBC News: [Brief description of Middle Eastern nuclear ambitions and current status in the Middle East, April 2008](#)
6. Wikipedia: [Nuclear program of Iran](#)
7. [NTI Israel Profile](#)
8. Brower, Kenneth S., "A Propensity for Conflict: Potential Scenarios and Outcomes of War in the Middle East," Jane's Intelligence Review, Special Report no. 14, (February 1997), 14-15. Brower notes that he is making a high estimate of the number of weapons.
9. [Israel - Nuclear Weapons](#), Federation of American Scientists.
10. [Transcript of the Director General's Interview with Al-Ahram News. International Atomic Energy Agency.](#)
11. [Mordechai Vanunu: The Sunday Times articles](#)
12. [The Legality of the UN Security Council demands on Iran](#) Cyrus Safdari, IranAffairs.com, August 2007
13. ["A Tale of Nuclear Proliferation: How Pakistani Built His Network"](#)
14. CFR: [Israel's Nuclear Program and Middle East Peace](#)