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On: 04 November 2011, At: 03:13

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsec20>

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Available online: 03 Oct 2011

To cite this article: Ivan Trushkin (2011): WMD-FREE ZONE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: FROM IDEAS TO REALITY, Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security, 17:4, 55-68

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19934270.2011.609731>

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Ivan Trushkin

WMD-FREE ZONE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: FROM IDEAS TO REALITY

The Middle East¹ has always been and still remains one of the most unstable parts of the world. A string of revolutions in the region in the first half of 2011 has only served to reinforce that notion. On the one hand, these latest events have forced the governments in the region to focus on their domestic problems (including, first and foremost, the problem of how to remain in power). On the other hand, there are growing international tensions within the Middle East.

The Middle East is in a unique situation in that the region could well give rise to a new nuclear arms race. There are three main reasons for that. First, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) have already been used there. Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against Iran and against Kurdish rebels in Iraq itself. Second, Israel already has nuclear weapons (though it neither confirms nor denies the fact); it has not signed the NPT and it is not going to join the ranks of non-nuclear-weapon states any time soon. That serves not only to erode the nonproliferation regime in the region but also to encourage other countries to build their own nuclear arsenals. Third, the existing tensions within the region (including non-recognition of Israel by most of the Arab states in the Middle East) could become a key factor in undermining the nonproliferation regime.

The need to prevent a nuclear arms race in the Middle East has been on the international agenda for decades. The most promising proposal here is to declare the entire region a nuclear weapon-free zone. Such zones already cover a large part of the globe, and they have earned themselves a reputation as an effective instrument of reducing the danger of a regional arms race.

The 2010 NPT Review Conference made the decision to convene in 2012 “a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, to be attended by all states in the Middle East, with the full support and engagement of the nuclear-weapon states.”²

The wording of the decision contains a fundamental contradiction. It follows from the document that the conference must be attended by Israel, which is one of the “states in the Middle East”—but Israel is not a member of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. Also, events in early 2011 and a wave of unrest in the Middle East have given rise to obvious skepticism regarding the likelihood of a regional conference on a WMD-free zone in the region being held in 2012. Countries in the region may simply decide that it is not the time for such a conference, preoccupied as they are with their pressing domestic problems. The WMD-free zone proposal may simply fall off the back of the wagon.

NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE ZONE IN UN DOCUMENTS AND REGIONAL TREATIES

The idea that the Middle East could become a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) goes back more than 35 years. The first proposal to that effect was made in 1974 by Iran, which was still on good terms with Israel at the time.³ The idea was backed by Egypt and Syria. On December 9, 1974 the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 3263 “Establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East.”⁴



A N A L Y S I S

The resolution said that establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone along with an appropriate system of safeguards could speed up the process of complete nuclear disarmament under effective international controls. The Resolution called:

- ❑ for the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East;
- ❑ for countries of the region to relinquish all attempts to acquire, manufacture or test nuclear weapons; and
- ❑ for all countries in the region to join the NPT.

Israel, which had already acquired nuclear weapons by that time, abstained during the vote on the Middle East resolution. In early 1980 it proposed its own resolution, which made the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East conditional on the launch of direct peace talks between countries in the region. But the Israeli initiative was never put to the vote; in the end, Israel gave its backing to the Middle East resolution proposed by Iran and Egypt.⁵

Starting from 1974 all the General Assembly resolutions on the Middle East NWFZ have been passed annually and unanimously. The gist of those resolutions was as follows:⁶

- ❑ Urgent practical steps need to be made towards establishing an NWFZ in the Middle East.
- ❑ Countries in the region are urged to place all their nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards.
- ❑ Countries are urged to relinquish all programs to acquire, manufacture, or test nuclear weapons.
- ❑ Countries in the region that have yet to join the NPT are urged to do so.

Later resolutions on establishing an NWFZ in the Middle East also included paragraphs on the need to ban military attacks on nuclear facilities; they also mentioned the importance of holding peace talks in the region.⁷ The proposal to ban attacks on nuclear facilities emerged in 1981, when Israel, which is not an NPT member, conducted an air raid against a nuclear facility in Iraq—which is a member of the treaty.⁸

In 1991 the UN Secretary General published a report on possible ways of establishing an NWFZ in the Middle East. The report mentioned that the region has several research reactors, some of which have not been placed under IAEA safeguards, while an effective NWFZ would require all such facilities to be placed under international controls.⁹

The report also noted that efforts to establish an NWFZ in the Middle East were being hampered by a number of unresolved conflicts in the region.¹⁰ To illustrate, only Egypt and Jordan have so far signed a peace treaty with Israel.

The treaty with Egypt was signed on March 26, 1979. The two countries recognized each other's sovereignty, as well as political and territorial independence. Israeli warships and merchant ships were granted free passage of the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. Israel completely withdrew its troops from the Sinai peninsula within three years of signing the peace treaty. The two sides agreed restrictions on the stationing of troops along the Israeli–Egyptian border. The treaty also noted that similar peace treaties must be signed between Israel and all the Arab states in the region. The document contained no mention of nuclear weapons in the region.¹¹

In 1994 Israel signed a peace treaty with Jordan. The two sides undertook a commitment to recognize and respect each other's sovereignty and territorial as well as political independence. They also agreed not to use against each other any conventional or non-conventional weapons. They undertook a commitment to work on this issue as part of a multilateral working group on arms control and regional security.¹²

The fundamental contradiction that stands in the way of implementing the Middle East NWFZ proposal have come into stark relief during the first 20 years since the proposal was put forward. The Arab states in the region and Iran believe that the main problem is Israel's refusal to join the NPT or to cooperate with the IAEA. Israel, for its part, says the main obstacle is the refusal of other countries in the Middle East to recognize it or to sit down with it at the same negotiating table.¹³ This contradiction is the main reason why the NWFZ in the Middle East has not been established.

MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY: THE MADRID PEACE PROCESS

Until the early 1990s there had not been any large regional platforms which the Middle Eastern states could use as a venue to discuss the NWFZ idea. The only platform was the UN General Assembly. The main reason for such a situation was the already mentioned unwillingness of countries in the region to sit down at the same negotiating table. The Madrid peace process became the first breakthrough in that regard.

In October 1991 the Middle Eastern states attended a conference hosted by Madrid. The aim of the conference was to give the countries a chance to find common ground and a way out of the impasse. The event did not focus on nuclear nonproliferation, but that subject was discussed as well. Shortly before the Madrid conference the idea of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East was expanded to cover all weapons of mass destruction. In 1991 Egypt urged all the key weapons-making states to support the idea.¹⁴

During the Madrid conference the Arab countries spoke in support of the Palestinian population and urged Israel to comply with UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.¹⁵ Israel, for its part, said the Arab countries in the region must recognize it. The main emphasis was placed on the fact that Egypt had managed to break the taboo on establishing relations with Israel and to sign a peace treaty. Tel Aviv argued that the signing of peace treaties with Israel by the Middle Eastern states could lay the foundations for peace in the region.¹⁶ Israel's main demand, therefore, is recognition by its neighbors in the Middle East.

One of the results of the Madrid conference was the establishment of a working group on arms control and regional security. The first meeting of the group was held in Moscow in January 1992, the last one in September 1995 in Amman.

The first round of the talks in Moscow was attended by delegations from Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as Egypt, Tunisia, Canada, Japan, European countries, Russia, and the United States. The talks held in Washington in 1992 became the first meeting of the working group in its final composition. It was in fact the first time Middle Eastern security was discussed by a group that included Israel, the Arab states, and the key international mediators.

The topic of nuclear nonproliferation was raised during the third round of the talks in Moscow in 1992. Egypt proposed that the next meeting of the working group must focus on discussing Israel's nuclear disarmament.¹⁷ Two weeks later Hans Blix, who was the IAEA secretary-general at the time, paid a visit to Israel—but nothing tangible was agreed.

During the fourth round of the talks Egypt asked Israel to support the proposed talks on arms limitation and verification. The proposal was met positively by Israel, and the meeting of the working group then approved its long-term goals. Participants also agreed to step up their efforts in a number of areas.

In January 1994 the head of the Egyptian delegation at the talks, Nabil Fakhmi, paid a visit to Israel, where he met his Israeli counterpart, David Ivry. Egypt wanted to put nuclear disarmament on the agenda of the multilateral talks as soon as possible. Israel insisted that such talks would be possible only after sustainable peace has been achieved in the region.¹⁸

Talks on the nuclear issue continued during the sixth round in Doha in 1994. But although the Arabs were united in their demand for Israel to sign the NPT, Tel Aviv stuck firmly to its previous stance: peace first, then NPT membership.

The seventh round of the talks was held that same year in Tunisia. Egypt wanted to discuss various aspects of WMD control in the region. The meeting also discussed the establishment of an NWFZ in the Middle East, including a system of inspections to be held in cooperation with the IAEA. The talks ended without a final document being signed. But it was decided to establish three regional security and conflict prevention centers in Amman, Tunis, and Doha. The working document of the seventh round of talks also spoke of the need for countries in the region to inform each other of any upcoming military exercises involving more than 4,000 troops or more than 110 tanks. Israel also confirmed its invitation to the Arab countries to visit its military facilities.¹⁹

The talks of the working group on arms control and regional security held in the first half of the 1990s demonstrated that the sides are capable of dialogue. Also, there was an understanding in



the region of what steps must be made to facilitate the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. The sides agreed that:²⁰

- ❑ The process of establishing such a zone would take several years.
- ❑ The region's countries must be given positive security guarantees by the official nuclear powers. If a country in the region becomes the victim of an aggression, the guarantor states must offer it assistance in repelling the aggression.
- ❑ A verification system is a must. Israel also said there would need to be a system of bilateral inspections so as to avoid any dependence on an international verification body (IAEA) governed by the majority of its members.
- ❑ A climate of trust between the countries in the region would greatly facilitate the establishment of a WMD-free zone.
- ❑ Israel was regarded as a nuclear-weapon state, although it has never officially confirmed its possession of nuclear weapons. The Israeli nuclear arsenal was regarded as more of a political than military instrument.

It is important to emphasize that a WMD-free zone in the Middle East was regarded as an entirely realistic, albeit lengthy project.²¹ The sides had managed to achieve a compromise on many issues, including the need for positive security guarantees.

Why, then, have the achievements of the Madrid peace process failed to become the critical mass to get the process going? In my opinion, the main reason is the deep-seated contradictions that had been piling up for years and decades. All the countries in the Middle East had agreed that the process of establishing a WMD-free zone would take years. They clearly realized that the mistrust between them was too strong. But the Madrid peace process that ended in the mid-1990s had set an unprecedented example of cooperation between the Arab states and Israel in an effort to find a way out of the impasse.

WMD-FREE ZONE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE NONPROLIFERATION REGIME

While work on the establishment of the Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone continued at international forums such as the UN General Assembly or other multilateral meetings, a parallel process was under way in the NPT Review framework. Several NPT Review Conferences have mentioned the Middle East NWFZ in their final documents. The Final Document of the 1985 NPT Review Conference declared that a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East would help to achieve peace and security in the region, and urged all the countries in the region to place their nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards.²²

In 1995 the NPT member states held a treaty review and extension conference. The Middle East was high on the agenda of the talks. The conference was taking place against the backdrop of clear progress achieved by the Madrid peace process. But as the number of countries involved in the discussion grew, so did the complexity of achieving a compromise.

Egypt was stressing the dangers of continued existence in the Middle East of nuclear facilities not covered by the IAEA comprehensive safeguards. Cairo insisted on the need to sign an international or regional agreement that would address the danger of the existence of nuclear weapons in the region and reaffirm the commitment of all countries in the region, including Israel, to abide by the NPT and to place the Israeli nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. Egypt proposed that the official negotiating process on the issue should be linked with the talks on establishing a WMD-free zone. In Egypt's opinion, an Israeli decision to join the NPT could be followed by the signing of peace treaties between Israel and the Middle Eastern states.²³

Cairo attempted to assume the role of a mediator between the Arab countries and Israel. On the one hand, it spoke of the need for Israel to join the nonproliferation regime. On the other, it made proposals on signing peace treaties between Israel and the Arab states in the region. Egypt's role in resolving the situation is difficult to overestimate. I believe that the latest events in the country and the change of government there will not affect national policy on this issue: Egypt will try to maintain its role as a mediator and peace-maker.

Lebanon argued that the conference must take the problem posed by the Israeli nuclear program more seriously because it was the cause of an imbalance which posed a serious threat to peace and stability in the region. It insisted that extending the NPT indefinitely would send the wrong signal to Israel to the effect that it can stay out of the nonproliferation regime for as long as it likes.²⁴ Meanwhile, a British representative said in his statement that it was impossible to expect Israel to join the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon state.²⁵ It was becoming obvious that achieving a compromise that would be acceptable to all sides (including Israel, which did not take part in the conference) was becoming increasingly problematic.

The Syrian representative devoted almost all of his statement to Israel's nuclear program. Damascus argued that Syria could not agree to an extension of the NPT unless Israel joined the treaty and placed its nuclear facilities under international safeguards. Syria also introduced a new proposal to postpone the Review Conference until all the "flaws in the treaty" have been eliminated.²⁶

Saudi Arabia and Algeria took largely similar positions on the proposed WMD-free zone in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia said the zone should be established as soon as possible; it urged Israel to join the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards.²⁷ Algeria joined these demands, and also said that more pressure should be put on Israel by the Middle Eastern states to encourage it to join the NPT as soon as possible.²⁸

Iran, quite predictably, focused on criticizing Israel. Iranian representatives said there was a direct link between Israel's decision to stay out of the NPT and the decision by a number of Middle Eastern states not to join the Chemical Weapons Convention.²⁹ In the opinion of Iran, such a situation was a threat to security in the entire region.

The resulting resolution on the Middle East adopted by the conference was a compromise between the Nuclear Five and the Arab states on the issue of the indefinite extension of the NPT. The resolution said all parties should work towards the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means. The resolution urged all the nations that remain outside the NPT to join the treaty and to place all their nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. The document also contained a paragraph on the need to step up the negotiations on establishing a WMD-free zone.³⁰

The Middle East resolution took a lot of effort to agree. The initial draft proposed by Egypt and several Arab countries condemned Israel for its failure to join the NPT and demanded the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the region. It also recommended that the nuclear powers should give special guarantees to the Arab countries in the region. After lengthy horse-trading between the American and Egyptian delegations the wording of the resolution was softened; the final text contained no mention whatever of Israel.³¹

Sergey Kislyak, the deputy head of the Russian delegation at the 1995 NPT Review Conference, had this to say about the link between the indefinite extension of the NPT and the Middle East resolution: "We could hardly accept the approach whereby the extension of the NPT was being made conditional on this or another state joining the treaty. At the same time, we share another approach: first we agree to extend the NPT, in everyone's interests—and then on this basis we work to make sure all the remaining states become involved. Many Arab states raised the issue of Israel as one of the central issues of the conference. My impression is that almost all the Arab countries are quite happy with the resolution we have passed. In the end, the decision to extend the NPT indefinitely gives us an additional instrument in our dealings with the countries that remain outside the treaty. Now they will not be able to raise some hypothetical scenarios that were possible before the NPT was extended indefinitely."³²

In many ways, the adoption of the Middle East resolution became possible thanks to the pressure put by the Middle Eastern states on the official nuclear powers. In return for agreeing to the indefinite extension of the NPT, they had achieved an intensification of the discussions on establishing a WMD-free zone in the region.

At the following NPT Review Conference in 2000 the Main Committee set up an Auxiliary Body to analyze the situation with the WMD-free zone in the Middle East. The body prepared a 10-paragraph document that became part of the final resolution. It echoed the 1995 Middle East resolution, but it also named Israel directly and said the country must join the NPT.³³ It must be noted that Israel continued to ignore those calls, sticking to its previous position to the effect that it is not bound by the terms of a treaty which it never signed.



The 2005 NPT Review Conference failed to agree a final document, but the Middle East issue remained at the top of the agenda. Speaking about the results of the international forums conducted in the NPT framework, two observations can be made. First, the idea of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East has officially been expanded to cover all weapons of mass destruction. Second, the participants have found it much more difficult to achieve any compromise with a large number of countries (some of them situated very far from the Middle East) taking part in the talks, while Israel stands aloof.

The Middle Eastern states are parties to most of the treaties related to nuclear nonproliferation. All of them, with the exception of Israel, have signed the NPT. But now that the idea of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East has been expanded to cover all WMD, we also need to take into account the situation with the chemical and biological weapons conventions.

At this time, of all the Middle Eastern countries, only Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria have not signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Algeria and Israel have not signed the Biological Weapons Convention.

Israel signed the CWC in 1993, but it has yet to ratify it. The country's official position is that it will not do so until all the Arab states have signed the convention. Egypt motivates its position on the CWC by Israel's decision to remain outside the NPT. The same argument is used by Lebanon and Syria.

Israel refuses to ratify the CWC because it has not been signed by Egypt. Egypt refuses to sign the CWC because of Israel's nuclear program, which Israel itself neither confirms nor denies. Egypt and Syria say they are ready to sign the CWC as soon as Israel destroys its nuclear arsenals and dismantles its alleged chemical and biological weapons programs. Egyptian officials have repeatedly indicated that Cairo will sign the CWC as soon as the problem with the Israeli nuclear program has been resolved.³⁴

The situation with the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is very similar. Of the 44 states whose ratification of the CTBT is required before the treaty can enter into force, three are in the Middle East. Egypt, Israel, and Iran have all signed the treaty, but they have yet to ratify.

In some ways, Israeli participation in the CTBT could help to alleviate the damage done to the country's reputation by its refusal to join the NPT. Tel Aviv signed the CTBT on September 25, 1996.³⁵ Given that Israel is also a member of the CWC, it can be said that it has demonstrated to the world a clear interest in arms control. In addition, Israel insists that it supports the nonproliferation regime, even though it is not a member of the NPT.³⁶

Pending the entry into force of the CTBT, Israel has designated six "cooperating national facilities" which submit information to the International Data Center in Vienna.³⁷ The cooperating facilities are the Israeli seismic stations that register any seismic activity on Israeli territory. In order to calibrate their equipment, in 2000 Israel detonated a conventional explosive charge in the Dead Sea. The event was attended by international experts at Israel's invitation.

According to Israel's official position, the following conditions must be met for it to ratify the CTBT.³⁸

- There must be an improvement in the general situation in the Middle East, including the signing of the treaty by the Middle Eastern states that have yet to do so (Syria and Libya).³⁹
- An effective verification mechanism must be set up to ensure compliance with the treaty.
- Israel must be given full and equal status at the regional group of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization's Preparatory Commission.

Judging from Cairo's official statements, Egypt's position on the ratification of the CTBT depends entirely on the position of Israel. Egypt has repeatedly made it clear that it will not procrastinate with the ratification if Israel demonstrates "an unambiguous intention" to ratify the treaty.⁴⁰

The third Middle Eastern state that must ratify the CTBT before it can enter into force is Iran. Ratification by Iran will be a complex process in view of the domestic opposition to such a move. The Iranian ruling elite does not seem to have a united stance on the nuclear issue. The mistrust of the West that has been cultivated in Tehran for decades remains too strong. Ratification by Iran should be viewed not only in the framework of the regional nonproliferation regime but also in a

much broader context. It would signal an improvement in the country's relations with the Western world, especially with the United States.

Be that as it may, several Arab states and Iran are using Israel's position as a pretext for not taking part in a number of key treaties that could facilitate the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. Ratification of the CTBT by Iran and Egypt would bolster the nuclear nonproliferation regime in the region. In the case of Iran, it would also alleviate suspicions regarding the military nature of its nuclear program.

2010 NPT REVIEW CONFERENCE

The 2010 NPT Review Conference has been the latest international forum to discuss the future of the WMD-free zone in the Middle East. The general mood of the conference was captured by a U.S. statement that "the Middle East now represents the greatest nuclear proliferation threat. Not all the countries in the region have joined the NPT, and some of the countries that have are violating their commitments under the treaty."⁴¹ In other words, without naming Israel, the United States has recognized that there is a problem with the single Middle Eastern state that has not signed the NPT—though it also drew attention to the countries which are "in breach of their commitments under the treaty."

Let us look at the position of individual states in the region.

Kuwait stresses that Israel is the only country in the Middle East that refuses to abide by the nuclear nonproliferation regime. It calls on the IAEA to suspend its technical cooperation program with Israel until Tel Aviv signs up to the NPT.⁴² Such proposals appear counterproductive, since even a minimal level of cooperation between Israel and the IAEA means that closer cooperation is possible in the future.

Syria believes it is regrettable that the nuclear-weapon states, which got their way with the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, then went on to increase their nuclear assistance to Israel, ignoring the concerns of the Middle Eastern states. Syria therefore proposes that a definitive deadline should be agreed for the implementation of the 1995 Middle East resolution.⁴³

Any attempts to impose a compulsory schedule would be unwise in the Middle East. The region is simply too unpredictable for such an approach to be productive. Nevertheless, the Syrian proposal does contain some elements that deserve serious study. There is an urgent need to search in earnest for solutions to problems related to the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

Sudan has also proposed that a definitive schedule should be agreed for the implementation of the Middle East resolution adopted at the 1995 NPT Review Conference. It believes that the states acting as depositaries for that resolution should put pressure on Israel to join the NPT and to place its nuclear program under IAEA safeguards. It has called on the nuclear-weapon states to desist from transferring any nuclear weapons technologies to Israel, and on the NPT member states which have information about Israel's nuclear program to make that information public.⁴⁴

The key point of this proposal is that pressure on Israel must be put by the states acting as depositaries of the resolution. But that does not mean that the Middle Eastern nations can absolve themselves of all responsibility for trying to find a compromise.

Yemen believes that Israel's nuclear policy could trigger an arms race in the entire region. It argues that the Israeli nuclear facilities should be placed under the IAEA comprehensive safeguards, and that the UN Security Council should take all necessary measures to ensure compliance with the resolutions to that effect. It also calls for practical mechanisms of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East to be developed.⁴⁵ It is quite obvious, however, that the proposal for the UN Security Council to adopt a binding resolution pursuant to these goals is unrealistic; Washington, which supports Israel, would never allow such a resolution to pass.

In the run-up to the latest NPT Review Conference the UN Secretary General published a report on establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. The report contains a summary of Israel's position on the issue. Israel believes that implementing the WMD-free zone proposal should be part of the wider peace process in the region. It says that the main violators of the nuclear nonproliferation regime are Libya and Iran, with their nuclear programs. It also urges the



international community to restrict the proliferation of nuclear fuel technologies.⁴⁶ The latter proposal should be viewed in the context of the Iranian nuclear problem, which is causing extreme concern in Israel.

The final document adopted by the 2010 NPT Review Conference says the 1995 Middle East resolution will remain in force until its goals and objectives have been achieved—but the proposal to set a firm deadline was not supported. The conference also expressed regret at the slow progress in implementing the Middle East resolution, and endorsed the following steps:

- ❑ The UN Secretary General and the co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution, in consultation with the States of the region, will convene a conference in 2012, to be attended by all States of the Middle East, on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction.
- ❑ Appointment by the UN Secretary General and the co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution, in consultation with the States of the region, of a facilitator, with a mandate to support implementation of the 1995 Resolution by conducting consultations with the States of the region in that regard and undertaking preparations for the convening of the 2012 Conference. The facilitator will report to the 2015 Review Conference and its Preparatory Committee meetings.
- ❑ Designation by the UN Secretary General and the co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution, in consultation with the States of the region, of a host government for the 2012 Conference.
- ❑ The IAEA, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and other relevant international organizations are requested to prepare background documentation for the 2012 Conference regarding modalities for a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, taking into account work previously undertaken and experience gained.⁴⁷

The Middle East section was included in the final document largely thanks to pressure put on the United States by Egypt, which threatened to block the adoption of the final document unless it mentioned the WMD-free zone in the Middle East. Speaking about the final document, the United States expressed deep regret that the document singles out Israel because in Washington's opinion that creates an unfavorable atmosphere for a successful discussion at the 2012 conference.⁴⁸

For the Middle Eastern states, the main outcome of the 2010 NPT Review Conference was the decision to conduct the 2012 regional conference. For the first time since the adoption of the 1995 Middle East resolution the NPT Review Conference has formulated specific measures on joint efforts aimed at establishing a WMD-free zone in the region.⁴⁹

Israel reacted to the decision of the 2010 Review Conference with anger, describing it as a “deeply misguided and hypocritical step.” In the opinion of Tel Aviv, the real problem for the WMD nonproliferation regime is posed by the countries that signed the NPT and then broke their commitments under the treaty, including Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Libya, Syria, and Iran. Israel, which has not signed the NPT, said it does not consider itself bound by the Review Conference's decisions and cannot take part in the implementation of its Middle East resolution.⁵⁰

Israel has already said that it does not intend to participate in the 2012 conference. But by doing so it has merely voiced its usual stance on the issue. What is really important is that the Middle Eastern states have managed to put the regional WMD-free zone back on the agenda and to agree on conducting a new regional forum. The proposals that can be discussed at the 2012 conference have already been formulated. The initiatives proposed by Russia and the Arab states appear the most constructive and therefore deserve special attention.

NUCLEAR ENERGY AND NONPROLIFERATION RISKS: THE RUSSIAN PROPOSALS

Speaking at a press conference in Syria in May 2010, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said that “the Middle East should become a nuclear-weapon-free zone, a nuclear-weapon-free region, because any other turn of events would mean a regional and maybe even a global catastrophe.”⁵¹ The statement had once again demonstrated Russia's interest in finding a way of establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

During the third session of the Preparatory Committee in 2009 ahead of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, the Russian delegation proposed a number of practical steps to that end. The delegation's statement said that the WMD-free zone in the Middle East was inextricably linked with the wider peace process in the region, and that given the situation on the ground, such a zone could not be established overnight. But it also stressed that the key steps the Middle Eastern states must take to bring that goal closer had already been formulated.

Among the practical steps Russia proposed "an international conference or meeting involving all the interested parties to discuss the prospects of implementing the Middle East resolution in its entirety." Russia also voiced the idea of appointing a special coordinator "authorized to hold consultations on this issue with countries in the region and make a report about the progress of this work during the review process."⁵²

Russia pointed out that energy demand in the region was growing, and that many of the Middle Eastern countries had shown interest in developing peaceful nuclear energy programs. To that end Russia proposed that multilateral approaches to peaceful nuclear energy should be developed, based on a non-discriminatory approach. Implemented in parallel with the establishment of a WMD-free zone and with placing all nuclear facilities in the region under the IAEA comprehensive safeguards, such a proposal would help to strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

Another confidence-building measure proposed by Russia as part of the efforts to implement the 1995 resolution is for countries in the region to undertake a commitment not to set up or expand uranium enrichment or spent nuclear fuel processing facilities. The proposal must be backed by nuclear fuel supply assurances based on a mechanism of multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle. As part of the initiative to implement this proposal, Russia has cited the International Uranium Enrichment Center in Angarsk and the guaranteed low-enriched uranium (LEU) reserve stored in Angarsk. LEU from the reserve can be supplied at the request of the IAEA to any country participating in the NPT in the event of disruption of commercial supplies of nuclear fuel.⁵³

The introduction in the Middle East of unilateral bans on the production of fissile materials for military purposes would help to defuse tensions in the region. Iran has repeatedly stated that it does not seek to acquire nuclear weapons, and that it is in compliance with all the international nuclear nonproliferation agreements. It could become the first country in the region officially to ban the production of such materials. In my opinion, such a move would achieve a twofold result. First, it would undermine the argument made by the critics of Iran's nuclear program. And second, it would increase pressure on Israel to join such a ban.

In this context, an interesting statement has been made by Bahrain, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. The three countries have recognized growing interest in nuclear energy in the Middle East, but said they would not seek to acquire sensitive nuclear fuel cycle technologies, including uranium enrichment and plutonium separation. The UAE has already imposed a ban on developing, building, or operating uranium enrichment or spent nuclear fuel processing facilities on its territory.⁵⁴

During the preparations for the 2010 NPT Review Conference, Russia said the Middle Eastern countries could take part in the work of the International Uranium Enrichment Center in Angarsk and count on supplies from the Guaranteed Nuclear Fuel Reserve in case of necessity. The proposal makes more realistic the idea that countries in the region should not pursue fissile material production programs.

MIDDLE EASTERN INITIATIVES

Israel has said on several occasions that it supports the nuclear nonproliferation regime, even though it is not a member of the NPT.⁵⁵ It argues that the applicability of the treaty in the region is limited since "three of the four widely known cases of violation of the NPT were in the Middle East."⁵⁶ Israel has repeatedly said that it regards the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East as a higher priority than joining the NPT.⁵⁷ Let us recall that, in the opinion of Israel, such a zone can be established only once peace has been established in the region.

It is unreasonable to expect that the WMD-free zone in the Middle East can be established without an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. But this does not mean that progress should not be sought in the negotiating process. Observers in the region say that the Arab countries continue



consultations among themselves on ways of establishing the WMD-free zone in the expectation that Israel will eventually join the process.⁵⁸

In 2002 the Council of Arab States approved the draft of the Arab Peace Initiative based on a Saudi plan. As part of the initiative, the Arab states urged Israel to affirm:

- full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967;
- compliance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (on Palestine); and
- acceptance of the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state on occupied territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In return for that, the Arab states were prepared to:

- consider the Arab–Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and provide security for all the states of the region;
- establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace; and
- invite the international community and all interested parties and organizations to support the peace initiative.⁵⁹

Even though Israel has rejected the proposal, countries in the region continue their work to promote the peace process. The implementation of such an agreement between Israel and the Arab states in the region would greatly contribute to peace and security in the Middle East and, by extension, to the goal of establishing a WMD-free zone in the region.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE 2012 CONFERENCE?

The Arab states and Iran view the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East as a step that can help to achieve peace in the region. But such a zone cannot be established for as long as Israel remains outside the NPT, possesses nuclear weapons, and rejects all calls to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. As a precondition, Israel demands that the Arab states recognize it and sign peace treaties with it.

The Madrid peace process, which ended in the mid-1990s, was an unprecedented example of cooperation between the Arab states and Israel in an effort to find a way out of the impasse. The 2012 conference could pick up the negotiations where the Madrid process left off. The issues discussed at the conference could include:

- ratification of the NPT by all states in the Middle East;
- signing an agreement not to attack nuclear facilities in the region;
- using the international nuclear fuel bank as an alternative to producing fissile materials in the region;
- establishing a regional verification and monitoring agency in the event of Israel refusing to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA controls; and
- ways of engaging Israel in the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

Ratification of the CTBT by all countries in the Middle East could become the first step towards making it a zone free of nuclear weapons. The situation whereby countries use the position of their neighbor as a pretext for not joining the treaty is completely unacceptable and must be resolved. CTBT ratification⁶⁰ is an important practical step towards the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the region.

States in the Middle East should follow the example of India and Pakistan,⁶¹ and sign an agreement not to attack each other's nuclear facilities. That would go a long way towards defusing tensions in the region and improving relations between the region's countries. Such

examples of cooperation despite continued mutual mistrust are a cause for optimism regarding the prospects for the Middle Eastern negotiating process.

The key principles of the monitoring and verification systems have already been formulated.⁶² In a region such as the Middle East there is of course a suspicion that the inspections could be used as a cover for gathering intelligence that could later be used against the host country.⁶³ But the establishment of a WMD-free zone would require much greater openness from the region's countries.

Israel argues that the IAEA is often unable to guarantee the absence of any military nuclear programs on the territory of its member states. But here we have the example of Brazil and Argentina. Under the agreement on the peaceful use of nuclear energy signed by the two countries on July 18, 1991, both committed themselves to using the nuclear material under their jurisdiction for peaceful purposes only. The agreement bans nuclear tests and requires the two countries to place all their nuclear materials under the Common System of Accounting and Control (SCCC). The two countries also established the Brazil–Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC), which runs the SCCC.⁶⁴

The establishment of ABACC helped to defuse tensions between Argentina and Brazil. The agreement, which was signed before the two countries joined the NPT, has made a significant contribution to strengthening the nonproliferation regime in the region and building mutual trust.

Countries in the Middle East can choose for themselves the safeguards system they want to implement. It can be the international system run by the IAEA—or it can be a separate body overseeing the monitoring and inspections system.⁶⁵ Setting up a special monitoring body in the Middle East is an entirely realistic task.

The proposal to use the international nuclear fuel bank as an alternative to producing fissile materials in the region itself should be given a serious consideration. Over the past several years a number of Arab states have expressed their interest in nuclear energy. They cite the energy deficit they are facing and their plans to increase their oil export revenues by selling more oil on foreign markets rather than consuming it domestically. That raises the question of where the fuel for future nuclear power plants will come from. The Russian proposals in this area provide a possible answer to that question.

Some experts propose that Israel could sign an agreement with the NPT depositary states, committing itself to cooperation with the international export control system for nuclear materials. The agreement could also contain a ban on the testing of any nuclear devices; a requirement to destroy all stockpiles of military nuclear materials; and a ban on the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons against any party.⁶⁶ Such an agreement would greatly contribute to efforts to establish a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

There is no point in expecting that the conference scheduled for 2012 will immediately resolve the issue of creating a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. But what we should expect is a road map, a clear plan of how countries in the region must move towards a WMD-free zone. Making the Middle East free of nuclear weapons is primarily a question of political will. A huge amount of work has been done over the past 35 years among the experts. That work could well serve as the foundation of the future WMD-free zone. 



For more information on nonproliferation, please visit the section “Nonproliferation and Russia” on the PIR Center website: npt.pircenter.org/eng.

NOTES

¹ The Middle East is defined in this study as agreed by IAEA experts in 1989. The area stretches from Libya in the west to Iran in the east, and from Syria in the north to Yemen in the south.

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- ⁶ Examples of such resolutions include GA UN Resolutions 3263 (1974), 3474 (1975), 31/71 (1976), 32/82 (1977), 33/64 (1978), 35/147 (1980), 36/87 (1981).
- ⁷ One example is Resolution 49/71 of January 9, 1995.
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- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
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- ¹⁵ The Madrid Conference Opening Speeches. Statement of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 1991, October 31, <<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Archive/Peace%20Process/1991/ADDRESS%20BY%20DR%20KAMEL%20ABU%20JABER%20-%2031-Oct-91>>, last accessed June 20, 2011.
- ¹⁶ The Madrid Conference Opening Speeches, Statement of Israel, October 31, 1991, <<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Archive/Peace%20Process/1991/ADDRESS%20BY%20MR%20YITZHAK%20SHAMIR%20-%2031-Oct-91>>, last accessed June 20, 2011.
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- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ J. Leonard and J. Prawitz, “The Middle East as a NWFZ or WMDFZ application,” excerpts from *Pacifica Review* 11, No. 3 (October 1999), pp. 263–263.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
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⁶¹ In 1991 India and Pakistan signed an agreement not to attack each other's nuclear facilities. In February 1999 they adopted the Lahore Declaration, which spoke of the need to take urgent measures to reduce the risk of an accidental or unauthorized nuclear launch. In June 2004 the Foreign Ministries of India and Pakistan set up a direct phone line to prevent "mutual misunderstandings" in crisis situations and to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict.

⁶² See, for example: *Building a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East. Global Non-Proliferation Regimes and Regional Experiences* (UNIDIR—United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research), 2004, pp. 98–100.

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