METO Student Journal of WMD Disarmament and Security in the Middle East

Feminist perspectives on international security and disarmament

Weapons of mass destruction free zone dividend

Obstacles facing the Zone

State perspectives on the Zone

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WMDFZ dividend
Budapest Peace Sign, 2006

Obstacles facing the Zone
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Note from the Editors

The METO Student Journal of WMD Disarmament and Security in the Middle East is a compilation of the best papers submitted by students following METO's 9-session summer course which took place in July and August 2021. The course provided students with a thorough understanding of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation across the Middle East and North Africa region and efforts to strengthen international non-proliferation regimes. Through class discussion and guest speakers from academia and practitioners in WMD non-proliferation, the course provided students with the ability to analyse challenges, revisit past efforts to achieve the zone and identify future scenarios to rid the region of all WMDs.

Our summer course had a broad geographic coverage with students coming from 23 different countries. It's worth noting that 45% of our students came from the region: Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran. It is also worth noting that our course achieved gender-balanced representation with 51% of women participants and 49% of men.

The success of our summer course could not have been achieved without the dedication of our distinguished guest lecturers, who are all leading figures in the world of WMD disarmament. We are grateful, humbled and thankful to the following for their contribution:

- Prof Zia Mian, Princeton University's Program on Science and Global Security
- Dr Tarja Cronberg, Distinguished Associate Fellow at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

- Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian, one of the chief negotiators from 2003-2005 on Iran's nuclear programme with the European powers, currently a research associate at the Program on Science and Global Security of Princeton University.
- Dr Carlos Umaña, Co-president of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear Weapons.
- Dr Chen Kane, Project Lead for the Middle East WMDFZ Project at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR),
- Dr Renata Dalaqua, Project Lead for Gender and Disarmament at UNIDIR

We would like to also extend a special thanks to METO's program associate Ekaterina Kibalchich for all her assistance in making sure the course proceeded smoothly and to Gabrielle Dyson for her thorough editing of the papers. Finally, many thanks to the wonderful students who participated and engaged enthusiastically in class and produced thoughtful papers and presentations on the need to advance the establishment of the zone. Also we need to mention that the views expressed in these papers do not necessarily reflect METO's position and remain the sole perspective of the students.

Acronyms

ACRS: Arms Control and Regional Security
BRI: China's Belt and Road Initiative
BWC or BTWC: Biological (or Biological and Toxin) Weapons Convention
CBM: Confidence-building measures
CTBT: Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty
CW: Chemical weapons
CWC: Chemical Weapons Convention
E3: Three European countries (France, Germany and the United Kingdom)
EU: European Union
GBV: Gender-based violence
GCC: Gulf Cooperation Council
IAEA: International Atomic Energy Agency
ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (or Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant)
JCPOA: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or Iran nuclear deal
ME: Middle East
NPT: Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty
NWFZ: Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone
OPT: Occupied Palestinian Territories
P5: Five Permanent Members of the United Nations Security Council
TPNW: Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
UN: United Nations
UNGA: United Nations General Assembly
UNIDIR: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
WMD: Weapons of Mass Destruction
WMDFZ: Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone
WPS Agenda: Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Feminist perspectives on international security and disarmament

What are the key elements of feminist perspectives in international security and disarmament?

What lessons can be drawn to advance the prospects for a WMDFZ?

A feminist take on hierarchical structures of international security and disarmament

Aayushi Sharma

The notion that weapons of mass destruction (WMD), especially nuclear weapons are a deterrent to severe armed conflict among the possessor states is a widely accepted proposition in the international security discourse.[1] This premise has, in a customary way, legitimized the possession of the nuclear weapons by the global powers. Various perspectives have tried to analyse the ideas of proliferation of these weapons and other WMDs through the lens of the structures of security and diplomacy. However, one important perspective brings into question the hierarchical structures of international security as well as the discourse on disarmament, i.e. the feminist perspective.

The main tenets of the feminist perspective question the inherent gendered hierarchy of the global power structure. This power structure is what aids the possession of these nuclear weapons and other WMDs.

The main tenets of the feminist perspective question the inherent gendered hierarchy of the global power structure. This power structure is what aids the possession of these nuclear weapons and other WMDs. The other important factor that is focused on by feminists is the wide disparities in the representation of people along the gender spectrum in the discourse of WMD Disarmament.

Gendered Structure

Gender is a social construction of the normative roles and these roles may take different forms depending on culture, ethnicity and other social considerations[2]. However, some attributes are often considered to be universally "masculine" and "feminine" and this is the aspect that the feminist perspective seeks to draw our attention to. The international security arena is not oblivious to these gendered traits. The very reason as to why the deployment and development of these weapons is a favoured practice in the international arena is that it projects higher masculine traits that seeks to empower a state against others. Scholars often agree to the idea that conflict and war is often considered to be a masculine practice whereas the issues of peace and 'disarmament' fall under the category of femininity.

This distinction also presents itself in the hierarchy that exists in the global power structures. The said hierarchy is between the possessors and the non-possessors of Nuclear Weapons. The Nuclear Weapon States are often considered to be the flag-bearers of international security and hence their 'masculinity' will protect the more feminine or non-nuclear states. When it comes to the discourse on disarmament, the proponents of nuclear weapons proliferation often use this argument of strength and protection to make a case for the deployment of such and other WMDs.[3] The role of women in this discourse is often attributed to the concepts of 'moral mothers' or their maternal instincts.[4]

Gender Disparities

These hierarchical distinctions are further reflected in the practical aspects of the disarmament discourse in the international arena. The latest report from the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) on Gender Balance in Arms Control, Non-Proliferation, Disarmament and Diplomacy titled *"Still behind the Curve (2019)*" empirically highlights the gender ratio skewed in

favour of men in dialogue forums. According to the report the participation of women in Arms Control and Disarmament discussions in various forums varies from 0 to 37%.[5] The report especially highlights that even though there has been a rise in the participation of women, the field is still dominated by more 'masculine' notions of security. The First Committee of the United Nations dealing with the issues of disarmament and non-proliferation saw the participation of only 32% of female delegates.[6] These statistics highlight the grave gender disparities that exist in forums of international security.

The Prospects of the WMD Free Zone

While arguing in favour of advancing the WMD Free Zone in the Middle East, it becomes imperative to draw the common attention to **the human cost** of the usage of these weapons. In this light, various feminist theorists such as Carol Cohn have highlighted the general attribution of such humanitarian concerns to 'femininity' by the male dominated discourse.[7] Hence, often it becomes easy to overlook the humane aspects of the discourse while the focus remains on the more "loud" and "masculine" aspects of security and conflict.

In this regard, when we consider the prospects of creating a WMD Free Zone, a significant lesson to be learnt is the **representation of diverse voices** from the region. The general situations of war or armed conflict affects men and women differently. While the more masculine traits of fighting a war are attributed to men, women constitute the major part of the population directly affected by the various human rights violations during an armed conflict.[8] In this regard, when we consider the impact of WMDs, it is far greater than an ordinary armed conflict. Even though the usage of WMDs would affect men and women alike, it is the underlying ideology and the gendered perspectives behind the proliferation of such weapons that need to be understood.

The feminist perspective seeks to challenge the very nature of the **structures**

of power that are built on the assumptions of the dichotomy of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'.[9] Therefore, in order to advance the cause of the WMD Free Zone it is important to pay heed to these structures that contribute to the maintenance of weapons of mass destruction.

In conclusion, various lessons can be drawn from the feminist perspective towards the creation of the WMD Free Zone, but the most important is the diversification and inclusion of the concerns and opinions of the many voices that exist within the region. This is because the usage of the WMDs would have an effect on all the people, regardless of their gender, ethnicity or ideologies.

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[1] There are currently nine states that possess nuclear weapons – US, UK, France, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea

[2] J. Butler. Gender Trouble. New York & Oxon: Routledge (1990).

[3] Ray Acheson. "A Feminist Critique of the Atomic Bomb". *The Green Political Foundation* (2018). Accessed on 11th September 2021: https://www.boell.de/en/2018/10/12/feminist-critique-atomic-bomb

[4] Yashna Agarwalla. "The Gendered Dimensions of Anti-Nuclear Weapons Policy". *E-International Relations* (2020). Accessed on 13th September, 2021: The Gendered Dimensions of Anti-Nuclear Weapons Policy (e-ir.info)

[5] Renata Hessmann Dalaqua, Kjolv Egeland and Torbjorn Graff Hugo. "Still Behind the Curve: Gender Balance in Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Policy". *UNIDIR* (2019).

[6] Marylia Hushcha. "Might Feminism Revive Arms Control? Why Greater Inclusion of Women in Nuclear Policy is Necessary and how to achieve it". *International Institute for Peace (2020)*. Accessed on 13th September : https://www.iipvienna.com/news-reports-publications/2020/4/28/might-feminism-revive-arms-control-why-greater-inclusion-of-women-in-nuclear-policy-is-necessary-and-how-to-achieve-it

[7] Carol Cohn and Sara Ruddick. "A Feminist Ethical Perspective on Weapons of Mass Destruction". *Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights (2003)*.

[8] Ibid

[9] Marylia Hushcha. "Might Feminism Revive Arms Control? Why Greater Inclusion of Women in Nuclear Policy is Necessary and how to achieve it". International Institute for Peace (2020). Accessed on 13th September : https://www.iipvienna.com/news-reports-publications/2020/4/28/might-feminism-revive-arms-control-why-greater-inclusion-of-women-in-nuclear-policy-is-necessary-and-how-to-achieve-it

A feminist perspective on the WMD Free Zone

Alice Filiberto

The interpretation and understanding of nuclear weapons in modern society can be seen as two sides of the same coin: on one hand, there is the international narrative and belief that they assure safety, security and stability; on the other hand, there is the question raised by the majority of the population: how can weapons of mass destruction, which have the role and capability of destroying the Earth and humanity, be considered as protection? Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons are a symbol of power, which re-enforce the structures and dynamics of a patriarchal system. This essay will demonstrate how weapons of mass destruction and patriarchy are deeply connected. Thus, a feminist perspective is needed in order to analyse the different dimensions where the former and the latter meet and influence each other, by shaping both society and the international system. To expand this argument, I will divide my essay into two parts: firstly, I will discuss what patriarchal ways of thinking and acting have brought to society and to the field of weapons; secondly, I will analyse the main elements of the feminist approach in relation to disarmament and international security, as well as their benefits, in order to deconstruct the patriarchal points of view.

Patriarchy is defined by the European Institute of Gender Equality as "a system of social structures and practices, in which men govern, oppress and exploit women" and this process delimits everything to two hemispheres: the male one and the female one, by subduing, as well as making inferior, the latter to the former and excluding anything that does not fit into these categories, such as non-binary people.[1] Thus, patriarchal structures and dynamics enforce the ideal

of masculinity and the characteristics inherent to it, which usually are: strength, power, bravery, protection, strategy. This idea of what defines masculinity is perfectly linked with the idea of weapons of mass destruction; in fact, as Ray Acheson affirms in her article *'A feminist critique of the atomic bomb'*, on The Green Political Foundation, "this form of masculinity influences the possession, proliferation, and use of everything from nuclear weapons to small arms. This is a masculinity in which ideas like strength, courage, and protection are equated with violence. It is a masculinity in which the capacity and willingness to use weapons, engage in combat, and kill other human beings is seen as essential to being 'a real man'".[2]

All of this has increased the belief in society of 'the harder the better': hence, it does not matter how much something can bring violence, death or pain, as long as the ideal of the powerful and wealthy white man who protects his land is maintained. This narrative has increased the use, possession and expansion of weapons of mass destruction around the world. In addition, it has led to low participation of women in diplomacy and disarmament. Indeed, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research has affirmed, "women are frequently underrepresented in international forums concerned with peace and security".[3] All of this has promoted a regime of privileges based on qualities, such as class,

Gender analysis and feminist approaches bring to light important processes in society, which uncover the wrong narratives that impact the image of both weapons and survivors and prevent a global Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone from being established.

gender, religion, race and culture. In order to deconstruct this reality, it is necessary to apply feminist perspectives.

There are two main elements of a feminist approach applied to disarmament and international security: the first one is to promote gender equality and to improve the presence of women in the field; the second one is to implement a gender analysis when it comes to weapons, in order to understand how they are interpreted by society. The application of these perspectives in the field of weapons of mass destruction produces many positive consequences. First of all, it links power and gender; secondly, it reduces inequalities in diplomacy and disarmament and, finally, it analyses the damages caused by nuclear, chemical and biological weapons on survivors. In fact, in this case, gender is strictly related to the issue of stigma, which has been reported by women survivors of WMDs, such as the Hibakusha: the people affected by the atomic bombs which hit Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The latter have been stigmatised as not worthy of marriage because they were contaminated by radiation: indeed, as Anne Guro Dimmen affirms in her piece *'Gendered Impacts'*, "it is often the case that women, rather than men, are those blamed for sterility or abnormality in offspring".[4] Thus, gender analysis and feminist approaches bring to light important processes in society, which uncover the wrong narratives that impact the image of both weapons and survivors and prevent a global Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone from being established. Ray Acheson asserts, "A feminist analysis also offers techniques to overcome this. It provides space for alternative voices. It does not diminish care for human beings by associating it with weakness, but with strength. It offers a concept of security based on equity and justice rather than weapons and war. It means being guided by affected communities. By survivors. By those living in places and spaces that are marginalised and excluded from dominant narratives."[5]

To conclude and summarise, I have argued that patriarchy and weapons of mass destruction are strictly related and, because of this a feminist approach in the

field of disarmament is necessary in order to get rid of nuclear, biological and chemical arms, by deconstructing the perception society has of them, which has been installed by both patriarchy and international systems of governance. Then, I have explained the roles and elements which characterise a feminist analysis, as well as its benefits. Indeed, it highlights the inequalities present in the world of diplomacy and in society, but it also explores deeper the effects that the damages brought by nuclear disasters have had on the population. Finally, I have come to the conclusion that gender and feminist perspectives have a great role in disarmament, since they raise awareness that the world needs to be better and that it can be.

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[1] European Institute for Gender Equality, [online] available at https://eige.europa.eu/docs/28_HU.pdf
[2] Acheson, R. (2018) "A feminist critique of the atomic bomb", The Green Political Foundation, [online] available at https://www.boell.de/en/2018/10/12/feminist-critique-atomic-bomb
[3] UNIDIR, "Gender Balance", UNIDIR, [online] available at https://unidir.org/gender-balance
[4] Dimmen, A. G. (2014) "Gendered Impacts", UNIDIR, [online] available at https://unidir.org/publication/gendered-impacts-humanitarian-impacts-nuclear-weapons-gender-perspective
[5] Acheson, R. (2018) "A feminist critique of the atomic bomb", The Green Political Foundation, [online] available at https://www.boell.de/en/2018/10/12/feminist-critique-atomic-bomb

Seeing international security and disarmament through a feminist lens

Mayssa Issaoui

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been considered as one of the most problematic regions in the world due to several political, social, and economic issues in the region. It has a history filled with instability; a present that does not seem very bright with the rising number of failed states and problematic relations; and a future that is expected to be dim if no actions are taken to redress these problems. Due to these reasons, establishing a WMDFZ in MENA is considered by many to be a crucial necessity in order to create a more stable region with a brighter future. The challenge is serious, and requires considering several factors. In this context, a feminist assessment of the question will be instrumental in achieving the zone through considering multiple factors in the creation of an all-encompassing, durable treaty, through a process sensitive to feminist perspectives in international security and disarmament.

Untangling and defining the difference between gender and feminism is necessary before delving deeper into the elements of feminist perspectives on international security and disarmament. Gender, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), refers to the "characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. (…) [It] varies from society to society and can change over time".[1] Meanwhile, feminism refers to "the belief in full social, economic, and political equality for women".[2] Based on these definitions, one could deduce that a feminist perspective on issues in the world is one that believes in the involvement and inclusion of women in all decision-making as much as men.

A feminist agenda in international relations aims at shedding light on broader components of WMD disarmament. It focuses on the different human and environmental risks of WMDs, the current discourses on security, as well as the socio-economic impacts of international policies on gender stereotypes.[3] Added to that, an inclusive, gender-sensitive foreign policy framework should focus on disarmament through intersectional inclusion. It should also prioritise the safety and the wellbeing of all individuals, ensure civil society integration, work on a dialogue-based solidarity, and promote empathy-based communities.[4]

The different weapons of mass destruction impact women and girls more than men and boys, both biologically and socially speaking.

Applying a gender lens to arms control and disarmament, according to UNIDIR, is crucial as it is a means to perceive the issue from several angles. It tackles how people from different sexes and ages are impacted differently by weapons of mass destruction. It sheds light on the discrepancy in their access to medical and health care. It also focuses on the extent and the mechanisms by which people from different sexes and gender roles have participated in international relations as a whole.[5]

Scholars and practitioners have shown at length the heterogeneous (distinct) impacts of weapons of mass destruction on different gender and social categories including men and women, boys and girls. For instance, UNIDIR's study of gender-differentiated outcomes of explosive weapons shows that men are more prone to death, while women are more prone to long-lasting and intergenerational health complications.[6] The same goes for the impacts of chemical weapons, where women are more susceptible to toxins than men; and children

more prone to exposure than adults.[7] Gender roles can also exacerbate the impact of biological and chemical weapons on men and women, such as "in distinct experiences of social stigma for individuals exposed to chemical or biological weapons".[8] Research has also indicated that women can be more exposed to gender-based violence (GBV) in the context of arms trading.[9] GBV refers to the phenomenon of "violence that takes place as a result of unequal power relations and discrimination in society on the basis of one's sex or gender".[10] It can be categorized into four groups, which are sexual violence, physical violence, emotional and psychological violence, as well as socioeconomic violence.[11]

The different weapons of mass destruction, as mentioned earlier, impact women and girls more than men and boys, both biologically and socially speaking. Nevertheless, women's involvement in arms control treaties has been little to non-existent throughout the years, due to traditional norms, described by Reshmi Kazi as "'natural' differentiation between the sexes [that] has permeated all aspects of nuclear policy making".[12] It is also interesting to note the gender-specific ways that women have been involved in different treaties and forums: women have been prominently involved in social questions rather than in political issues or peace negotiations. A typical example, the "UN body with the highest proportion of women was the Third Committee, dealing with social, humanitarian, and cultural issues".[13] Women diplomats comprise only a third of participants in forums that discuss arms control and non-proliferation, and this drops to 20% in more specialized forums where the delegations are led by a majority of men.[14] Even in more local and regional issues, gender disparity is still prominent especially in Arab League States, which suffer from the most disproportionate share of male and female representatives (approximately 80% men). It is also noted that the more responsibility and power a position holds, the less women are involved, even in international and high-level political forums.[15]

Feminist researchers tackling the gender disparity in international relations and in political discourses have asked the question "where are the women?"[16] Their efforts include calling for more inclusive discussions and forums where both men and women are equally represented. Significant steps in addressing this problem include UN Resolution 1325, a turning point that led to the creation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS Agenda) in 2000. The Agenda focused on four main ideas, summarized by: ensuring women's participation in all international and political discussions in leading positions; preventing and protecting women from gender-based violence and all forms of violence; and relief and recovery, aiming to ensure that women's and girls' voices are accounted for.[17] Even given these efforts, equal participation of both men and women remains out of reach, especially in leadership positions, in decision-making in political discussions and in international security and disarmament treaties. The WPS Agenda itself has received criticism, for instance for failing to devote sufficient attention to the issues of disarmament and arms control.[18]

Applying a feminist perspective in disarmament and international security is part of the journey towards achieving a WMDFZ in MENA and creates the potential to shape a more nuanced and complete analysis. Considering all the elements that this paper raises, focusing on how to address them, and finally learning from them, could pave the way towards the creation of a comprehensive gender-inclusive treaty. Practitioners and policy-makers continue to work towards overarching gender equality in future and current questions related to International Relations. This will hopefully contribute to paving the way towards a MENA region free from all WMDs.

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[1] "Gender and health", World Health Organization (WHO). Available online: https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1

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[6] Ibid
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[14] Renata Hessmann Dalaqua, Kjolv Egeland and Torbjorn Graff Hugo. "Still Behind the Curve: Gender Balance in Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Policy". *UNIDIR* (2019).
[15] Ibid.
[16] Enloe, Cynthia. Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics. 2014. University of California Press.
[17] Myrttinen, Henri. 2020. Connecting the Dots: Arms Control, Disarmament and the Women Peace and Security Agenda. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. https://doi.org/10.37559/GEN/20/01
[18] Ibid.

WMDFZ dividend

What are the benefits of establishing the WMDFZ for the region and its people in terms of both non-proliferation and broader (human & state) security issues?

What are the benefits of a WMDFZ?

Giada Del Russo

A weapons of mass destruction free zone (WMDFZ) can be defined as a zone free of nuclear, biological, chemical, and radiological weapons.[1] As states are driven by the notion of deterrence against regional enemies in their quest for these weapons, an important question is to be addressed: what are the benefits of establishing a WMDFZ for the region and its people in terms of both non-proliferation and broader security issues?

This paper will argue that in terms of non-proliferation benefits, it would be a step forward in the elimination of weapons of mass destruction and a glimmer of hope for the field of disarmament, as it would symbolize the possibility of further elimination of such weapons everywhere. Secondly, it will argue that broader benefits include the elimination of a threat to the wellbeing of people and the planet, a relief in terms of inter-zonal issues and improved security overall.

In the context of this paper, we will consider all the twenty-two Arab League countries, and Israel and Iran to be part of the zone. It is also important to note that this paper is by no means exhaustive, but instead aims to give a broad view of the numerous benefits a WMDFZ would bring if it were to be adopted.

Non-proliferation benefits

To start, the first benefit of establishing the WMDFZ for the region in terms of non-proliferation is that it would be a huge step towards the elimination of WMD everywhere. Notably, nine out of twenty-eight countries worldwide that possess or have the capability to build these weapons are in the region: these include Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Syria.

Four of these have physically used chemical weapons. For context, napalm was used by Egypt against Yemen, Iraq employed tabun, sarin and mustard gas against its own Kurdish population and against Iran, and Israel used white phosphorus on Gaza.[2]

The aim of all disarmament conventions, such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), and the various conventions on the prohibition of chemical and biological weapons (CWC and BWC) is to eliminate the presence of all WMD, as they represent a risk to everyone.[3] The Canberra Commission states that "so long as any such weapons remain, it defies credibility that they will not one day be used, by accident, miscalculation."[4] Therefore, the elimination of any number of WMD is to be seen as a step towards a more secure world. When it comes to non-proliferation, the benefit is therefore arguably the most crucial of all non-proliferation ideals: the elimination of several classes of weapons of mass destruction.

To start, the first benefit of establishing the WMDFZ for the region in terms of non-proliferation is that it would be a huge step towards the elimination of WMD everywhere.

Secondly, it would represent a glimmer of hope for non-proliferation efforts. It is imaginable that if it were to be achieved it would be a symbol to any other country that a WMDFZ can be a real possibility anywhere. As the region is the most volatile and politically complex area in the world, it would be a sign that disarmament is feasible even in the harshest disputes and would open doors in terms of India-Pakistan relations for example. Most importantly, it would also be a reminder for the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (P5)

of their disregard for their NPT obligations and their duty to disarm. The P5 have in fact been growing their arsenals vertically and horizontally during the last few years, meaning they have been growing and improving their weapons of mass destruction capabilities.[5] Consequently, another benefit of establishing the Zone in the Middle East would be that it could cause pushback from other countries, civil societies, and members of the public. Arguably, they would grow increasingly tired of empty promises and violations of their NPT obligations by seeing Middle Eastern states disarm: they would guide non-proliferation efforts.

Broader (human & state) benefits

Secondly, the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East carries broader benefits on the environment and on health. Admittedly, research into the effects of WMD underline both short-term and long-term consequences: the immediate effects of the explosions, which would wipe out entire populations and urban areas, would trigger longer-term consequences which would impact populations, by causing displacements, tumours and deformities in the unborn, irreparable damage to cities, infrastructure and nature.[6] After a nuclear explosion, growing seasons would be shorter and the climate would become colder, triggering famines.[7] Hence, the elimination of an important risk to human health, both physical and psychological, and to the environment would be a benefit. Moreover, it would place people and the environment at the centre of the discourse.

What is more, we find a wealth of advantages for the state too. Firstly, it would represent a relief in terms of inter-zonal political issues. Relations between Israel and Egypt for instance are complicated by the belief that Israel possesses nuclear capabilities, and related rivalries with Syria also surround their motivation to acquire such weapons.[8] Moreover, Israel and Saudi Arabia consider Iran's

nuclear programme to be a threat to their existence and security.[9] Clearly, although many of the region's problems are not related to WMD, these weapons exacerbate tensions. One benefit of the zone for states would be relieving the region from a nuclear arms race, which leads to more hostile relations: it would foster more trust between these states. Moreover, it would keep relations on a level playing field and not disturb the balance of power.[10]

Finally, another benefit of the zone would be improved state security overall. This is because of the risk of damage to infrastructure, transport, the economy, and the political system.[11] However, it is also because of the elimination of the chance of non-state actors acquiring WMD.[12] Although it is almost impossible for terrorist organizations to acquire WMD because of their limited capabilities, this is not a given as it is believed that a crude nuclear bomb could be created. What is more, it is feasible for non-state actors to acquire biological or radiological weapons or for cyberattacks to take place.[13]

In conclusion, this essay has demonstrated the benefits, both in terms of non-proliferation and in terms of wider security issues, which a WMDFZ in the Middle East would bring. Not only would it be an encouragement for all nations to follow the path of the Middle East when it comes to WMD, but it would also entail a more secure and more peaceful region. Understanding the benefits that this zone could bring is essential to convince states to follow suit and shed light onto the numerous issues that it would solve in the region, notably in terms of national rivalries and the arms race.

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Obstacles facing the Zone

What are the key obstacles facing the establishment of the Zone and the efforts to overcome them?

What's in the way of establishing a Zone?

Esra Serim

The establishment of a WMD-free zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East is part of a broader regional security dialogue. For many years, although the international community has set the objective of establishing such a zone in the region, significant progress has not occurred. Yet as tensions continue to increase in the region, so does the urgent need for a WMDFZ. Significant obstacles still prevent a broader regional dialogue and denuclearization efforts towards establishing the zone, and contribute to deepening enmity, distrust, and lack of cooperation among many countries in the region. The following discussion presents the principal obstacles that continue to hinder progress: the ever-worsening situation in Israel and Palestine; the strained or non-existent diplomatic relations between many regional states, notably with respect to Iran; uncertainty surrounding the continuation or revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal; Israel's nuclear weapons programme; instability caused by powerful non-state actors in the region; and technical barriers.

First among these obstacles is the ongoing breakdown of the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Over the decades, no approach has succeeded in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Having failed at attempts to resolve the conflict, the United States' position has led to a deadlock for establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East. US foreign policy continues to maintain Israel's state security as a top priority,[1] so, for instance, the US administration blocked the 2015 NPT Review Conference Final Document citing Israeli concerns regarding its security interests. Similarly, Israel and the US announced that they would not participate in the November 2019 UN conference on a WMDFZ.[2] The Israeli and US absence from the negotiations directly present challenges to the sustainability of the process.

Secondly, various regional states, such as Iran and Israel, do not officially recognize each other, while others like Iran and Saudi Arabia share no diplomatic relations. Accordingly, no security framework or regional organization has so far offered the necessary conditions for all regional countries to meet and discuss their concerns and interests regarding the Zone, in particular, since the 1979 Iranian Revolution which resulted in increasing militarization and animosity between Iran and regional opponents, including Israel and states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). As a result, "the strained relations between Iran and the GCC—and Saudi Arabia in particular—are a destabilizing factor in the region" and cause unending proxy battles that block the possibility of achieving a WMDFZ in the Middle East. [3]

Uncertainty around the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) since 2018 has impacted the trust in multilateralism that is necessary for the establishment of the Zone.[4] After the Trump administration decided to withdraw the US from the Iran nuclear deal, the Biden administration reinitiated negotiations with Iran in Vienna in 2021. At present, demands from both the US and Iran make a renewed JCPOA or any other agreement on Iran's nuclear programme appear unlikely.[5]

The Israeli nuclear weapons programme creates another obstacle to establishing a WMDFZ in the region. Israel is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons, but has never officially confirmed their existence. Moreover, because Israel is not party to the NPT safeguard agreement, its nuclear facilities are at high risk due to "possible conventional weapons attacks from state and non-state actors, technical issues caused by the age of the reactor, lack of institutional oversight and natural disasters."[6] In addition, the Arab states and Iran view Israel's nuclear ambiguity approach as an existential threat to their own security. According to them, "if Israel makes nuclear threats, those threatened will believe that Israel has the capabilities necessary to realize them."[7] Thus, convincing Israel

to join the NPT and participate in conferences related to the WMDFZ seems a vital step towards disarmament in the Middle East.

The rise of non-state actors in the Middle East has multiplied opportunities for WMD trade and proliferation. The appearance of non-state actors like Islamic State (ISIS) since the Arab Spring in 2010, changed fundamental dynamics in the Middle East. The Arab uprisings caused chaos and instability in many states where they sprang up (from Tunisia and Libya to Yemen and Syria). This created a power vacuum and conditions where WMDs could proliferate to non-state actors without a formal government, institutional framework or enforcement of international laws and agreements. In this context, non-state actors that control territory captured from unstable governments could gain access to WMD facilities, or even force experts to supply them WMD materials, technology, and know-how. In fact, the Islamic State actively seeks WMDs, which it could acquire through simply purchasing on the black market.[8] For instance, many incidents of chemical weapons use (sarin and chlorine gas) have occurred during the ongoing civil war in Syria, several of which ISIS has been suspected of committing since 2015.[9]

Lack of effective verification and accountability measures (or differences in scope and verification of such measures) remain very problematic.

Finally, technical challenges continue to hinder the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East. Lack of effective verification and accountability measures (or differences in scope and verification of such measures) remain very problematic. In addition, the absence of supporting institutions in the Middle East calls for new approaches.[10]

Freeing the Middle East of all WMD and their delivery vehicles requires a direct, continuous, and strong disarmament and non-proliferation dialogue both among the regional countries and among global powers such as the EU, the US, Russia, and China. First and foremost, mistrust among regional countries and uncertainty in the process must be reduced. The United States plays a major role in the Middle East and can take concrete steps to use coercive diplomacy towards Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. As a first step, the US administration can participate in multilateral efforts with Russia and the EU, restore the JCPOA with Iran and broaden the Abraham Accords.[11] In addition, the US and other nuclear weapons states could implement negative security guarantees as a means of convincing the Arab States and Iran. Similarly, Israel can be given positive security assistance to conquer its fears about entering into arms control and disarmament agreements.[12]

Strengthening regional verification and monitoring mechanisms under the UN and the IAEA can also help reduce mistrust. The experiences of other regions with nuclear-weapon-free zones, such as Latin America and the Caribbean with the Treaty of Tlatelolco, indicate that "confidence in the ability to verify the provisions of a zone is a major requirement for successful negotiation and implementation."[13] This can convince Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia to be more involved in cooperation and dialogue. On the other hand, increasing the "collaboration of civilian and military communities"[14] among the regional countries and those countries providing material and technology (including the EU, the US, Russia, and China) can contribute to WMD elimination efforts and prevent access to materials and facilities by non-state actors such as ISIS and Al-Nusra. Ultimately, international and regional civil society organizations must be strengthened to prioritize disarmament and human security.

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The long and bumpy road to realize the Zone

Gaia Durante Mangoni

During a trip to Syria in 1941, Charles de Gaulle wrote in his *War Memoirs*: "towards the complicated Orient, I flew with simple ideas".[1] Over 80 years later, regional tensions are still escalating, and the spiralling proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) erodes the efforts to establish a zone free from those weapons (WMDFZ). The Middle East (ME) is a strategic area. On the one hand, it has vast reserves of energy and maritime resources. On the other, it is a hotbed of territorial disputes and struggles for regional hegemony, and is an extremely militarized zone. This creates acute insecurity, which destabilizes the international system as well. In this major hub of WMD, Realpolitik remains the dominant paradigm in security relations. This prompts the question of whether it is possible to define the key obstacles to the establishment of this Zone, and which steps have been taken to overcome these varied deadlocks? This paper identifies three main hindrances to a WMDFZ (and associated proposals to surmount them): chronic mistrust and lack of regional integration; the strong nuclear asymmetry posed by Israel's *de facto* possession of nuclear weapons; and Iran's aspiration to develop a nuclear programme threatening a regional arms race. In particular, the discussion sheds light on the European Union's (EU) bridge-building stance in this turbulent context.

The chronic mistrust within the region makes it easier for countries to circumvent compliance. A modicum of mutual interaction between anchor states is an essential prerequisite for creating a WMDFZ.[2] Yet, the ME lacks regional platforms for cooperation and dialogue. The scarcity of collaboration fragments this "region without regionalism" culturally, politically and economically.[3] This

low level of joint engagement is due to the resistance of individual states to any limitation of their sovereignty.

We should recognize that WMD disarmament in the ME has started already, more precisely in November 2019 during the Conference on the Establishment of a WMDFZ.

This is accompanied by intra-regional power asymmetries, the prevalence of national interests and insurmountable security dilemmas.[4] All previous attempts to set up regional integration have been unsuccessful.[5] For example, the Arms Control and Regional Security in the ME (ACRS) process sought to reduce and eliminate WMD and their delivery systems, and to establish confidence-building measures (CBMs) amongst states. This group held several meetings between 1992 and 1995, but those sessions were broken off because of internal discords.[6] Among the more hopeful schemes was the 2004 UN Report, suggesting a three-step strategy that could be implemented without compromising the parties' security. The first stage involved the adoption of more robust security structures and CBMs and the enforcement of a "no-first-use" policy by all. The second stage called for setting a ceiling on existing stockpiles of WMD and freezing the production of fissile materials. Lastly, the third stage proposed the gradual elimination of WMD stockpiles, which could only occur after normalizing Israeli-Arab relations.[7] Without a sense of commonality, multilateralism and a valid rules-based verification apparatus a WMDFZ cannot be promoted, and countries' interests cannot converge, nor can national worries and suspicions be allayed, especially if one among them actually is a nuclear state.

The presence of a *de facto* nuclear weapons state, Israel, determines the nuclear imbalance in the region. Israel holds to a policy of ambiguity, which is perceived

by others as nuclear "opacity".[8] It is highly unlikely that Israel would decide to dismantle its nuclear arsenal under current conditions. Feeling existentially threatened by its neighbours, Israel deems nuclear weapons the only safeguard against hostilities and enemies, especially Iran and Arab countries. Israeli leaders consider their nation's military monopoly in the region (Israel is the most powerful country in military terms) and its nuclear uniqueness as the only way to ensure its permanent security. Both the US and the EU share a common goal with Israel: curbing Iran's atomic expansionism. Since last August, the US-Israeli coalition is discussing a plan B to revitalize the 2015 Nuclear Deal, considering alternatives to the conventional diplomatic path. In fact, the Israeli Prime Minister Bennett asked Biden for funds and support for his strategy, aiming to contain Tehran's nuclear ambitions and preserve Israel's status as a unique regional nuclear power.[9] However, this is a flawed approach.

Limiting nuclear negotiation efforts to a bilateral architecture, concerning Americans and Israelis only, derails the broader disarmament effort. Multiple actors are implicated in this process, from states (both within and outside the ME), to researchers and independent experts, to civil society and multilateral organizations. This is where the EU comes into play. The EU needs to be at the forefront of alleviating animosities. Its Joint Commission can coax Washington towards the traditional diplomatic option, the only way to ensure the success of EU foreign policy. As the Joint Commission has highlighted, the Iran Deal is an instrument belonging to the international community as a whole, not a bilateral agreement restricted to two parties. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, emphasized that considering this greater inclusivity reinforces that this accord is a comprehensive framework, thereby facilitating reconciliation and disarmament.[10] Notwithstanding, amid such havoc, the EU still lacks an evolving common and integrated foreign policy for security and defence. This supranational body must opt for more

constructive diplomatic means to compensate for its lack of consistent military instrument.

Finally, the spotlight turns to Iran. This nuclear aspirant jeopardizes the prospects of a WMDFZ, insofar as its behaviour could trigger a regional arms race and a possible nuclear "domino effect" in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.[11] Although Tehran continuously states that its purposes are exclusively peaceful (civil uses only of nuclear technology), the international community holds widespread dread that it is acquiring technical capabilities (mainly by enriching uranium, surpassing the authorized levels) and fissile materials for clandestine military activities. Iran's lack of transparency, along with its aggressive rhetoric for regional leadership, raises legitimate doubts and anxieties about why it is embarking on an expensive and complicated nuclear programme despite its plentiful energy resources.[12] Like Israel, Iran has long feared armed attacks, especially during the Bush administration, when the massive American military presence in the region fuelled Iran's feeling of being surrounded.[13]

The 2018 American withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action (JCPOA), combined with Trump's "maximum pressure" on Iran fractured the "transatlantic link" and ruled the White House out of the decision-making process.[14] The EU, traditionally the US's strategic allies and trading partner, entered the scene to mitigate the historic US-Iran animosity, in light of the deterioration of relations. Thus they managed to keep this agreement alive between Iran and other signatories, the "E3/EU+3" (France, Germany, the UK/the EU + the US, Russia and China). Still, talks were put on hold in June 2021 in the run-up and aftermath of Iran's elections and the victory of the new Conservative President Ebrahem Raisi.

To switch the engine on again, Biden must reassume the leading role in negotiations, but there is also greater space for the EU. Spearheaded by High Representative Josep Borrell, the EU should take the reins of the forthcoming talks,

setting clear deadlines for open dialogues and initiatives. Among the tasks the EU should accomplish (together with the US and the UN Security Council), the most urgent is probably encouraging the Biden administration to earnestly reengage in the deal, consolidating its full application. Moreover, progressively lifting the financial and economic sanctions on Iran, and ensuring that the latter avoids retaliation measures, is paramount because it would freeze forms of reprisal from both Washington and Tehran. Stimulating trade between Europe and Iran will support Iran's recovery after the devastations caused by Covid, and eventually create a new opportunity to nurture an enduring synergy.

Once the deal is revived, launching further negotiations to break unresolved standoffs (maritime security, extremist threats and health) that still hamper normalcy in the Gulf will galvanize the various interlocutors to act in concert.[15] The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi recently declared that the IAEA is "the guarantor of what is agreed at the political table".[16] This agency also recognizes that the abundance of actors involved exacerbates the predicament, making conjectures more unpredictable. It seems certain that, as recently announced by Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani, his country is willing to come back to the table and restore negotiations in Vienna by December, a disposition presumably economically motivated, given the growing inflation in Iran. However, Iran's oil prices have also increased lately (to over $80 per barrel), so Tehran is probably taking advantage of this favourable circumstance to ask for lightening sanctions. It would not be overly pessimistic to claim that trust will not become the norm anytime soon.

The American disengagement in the region has certainly favoured Iran's assertiveness. Given current geo-economic and geo-strategic circumstances, durable peace and stability cannot ensue without resolving this matter of regional insecurity. The EU therefore must bolster cooperation and urge the US to circumvent the stalemate with Israel and Iran. The EU reiterated that it firmly supports

the creation of the Zone, starting with its vibrant mediation between a wide range of representatives. This process should indeed involve experts from research environments (such as independent research and action centres on non-proliferation and disarmament), civil society bodies and governments. Addressing the three structural issues discussed above will foster regional cooperation to face future challenges, such as oil depletion, rising temperatures, migration flows, water scarcity in the face of ongoing population growth, countering violent extremism and strengthening the NPT; all positive results that transcend the boundaries of the ME.[17] What's more, to conclude on a positive note, we should recognize that WMD disarmament in the ME has started already, more precisely in November 2019 during the Conference on the Establishment of a WMDFZ in the ME. Regional states (with the exception of Israel) decided to announce a mutually-agreed document, asserting their political will and acknowledging the urgency of reaching a positive verdict. The road is still long and uphill, but at least we're on it, so let's keep going and make our way.

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WMDFZ: Obstacles and solutions

Nadine Easby

In 1990, Egypt proposed a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East, which built upon longstanding calls to establish a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (NWFZ).[1] In 1995, the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference called for "the establishment of an effectively verifiable Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical and biological, and their delivery systems that extended the Treaty on Nuclear Non-Proliferation (NPT) indefinitely."[2] Both measures have amassed high levels of international support, but concrete progress has since been elusive. This paper will therefore deconstruct the many obstacles facing the establishment of the zone, and will explore the efforts to overcome them.

Israel is wary of a WMDFZ process that does not provide reasonable verification mechanisms to ensure that all states in the region are complying with disarmament.

The NPT has been signed and ratified by every country in the Middle East, with the exception of Israel. However, various violations by such countries, along with the P5 states being slow to make disarmament commitments, has ultimately corroded the credibility of the international non-proliferation regime; "representing its inability to constrain state behaviour and verify compliance measures."[3] Obstacles facing the zone can be separated into four areas: non-participation, subversion, non-compliance and demonstration effects. These have all stalled initiatives to establish a successful WMDFZ in the Middle East.

In terms of non-participation, Israel is the only state in the region not to have signed the NPT, as noted. However, Israel, Djibouti and Comoros have not signed the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), with Egypt, Somalia and Syria signing but failing to ratify.[4] Despite Egypt initially proposing the WMDFZ, it is the only country in the Zone not to have signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), nor to ratify treaties that it has already signed such as the BWC and the CTBT, which creates a credibility issue, and marginally reduces confidence-building measures in the zone.[5]

Syria's acquisition and demonstrated use of chemical weapons has "legitimated further acquisition of WMD capabilities, due to deterrence concerns".[6] Syria argued that it would not join the CWC until Israel joined the NPT, however after the sarin gas attacks in Ghouta in 2013, it was ultimately forced to do a deal brokered by Russia, the US and the UN. State and non-state actors have raised doubts about the truthfulness of Syria's declared chemical weapons stockpiles including chlorine gas, and the existence and use of CW in the region create an obstacle to the realization of a Middle East WMDFZ by depleting trust in the Zone.

The question of Israel is frequently cited as the cause of nuclear ambitions in the Middle East, with "every leader in the region that has pursued nuclear weapons claiming the need to deter Israel" due to the country's ambiguous nuclear weapons programme. As such, the latter is a large source of insecurity and proliferation that has defined every regional proposal for the establishment of a WMDFZ.[7] The US provides 'double standard treatment' through strong political cover and support for the Israelis in the name of their exceptional alliance in allowing such programmes to develop.[8] This goes contrary to Washington's own interest in nuclear non-proliferation and has "amplified the mistrust and negative feelings of Arab states", ultimately damaging the already strained relations among countries in the region and making constructive engagement on the WMDFZ less likely.[9]

Israel is wary of a WMDFZ process that does not provide reasonable verification mechanisms to ensure that all states in the region are complying with disarmament. As the British American Security Informational Council (BASIC) observes, "many Israelis believe their security depends upon a nuclear 'Samson option' of retaliation against their neighbours", which they are not yet prepared to give up.[10] Israel strongly believes in its right to own a nuclear deterrent, and without significant security guarantees from neighbours, is steadfast in its aim to protect itself through a policy of ambiguity on its nuclear programme. However, transparency over Israel's nuclear arsenal is critical to enable a serious debate on the issue of a WMDFZ in the Middle East and has become a large obstacle for the Zone. Diana Ballestas de Dietrich, formerly of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization, argues that as Israel is the only nuclear possessor state in the region, "the issue at stake is not about a WMD free zone, but ultimately about disarming Israel."[11]

Another obstacle lies in the prolonged negotiations between Israel and the Arab states, as participants become frustrated and 'dig in' to their positions. The 'long corridor', an Israeli negotiation strategy which divides issues into smaller steps (for example: proposals for a Chemical-Weapon-Free Zone, then linked to other questions such as recognition of Israel), has made Arab partners wary, entangling the process as Israel insists that achieving "meaningful progress on the zone must be conditioned on resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict".[12] However, Egypt claims that the zone can only "mitigate regional conflict at lower levels of armament".[13] The failure to reconcile these opposing views on the Zone constitutes a primary obstacle to disarmament in the Middle East, and negotiations become so entangled that they become unresolvable.

Until the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, the military dimension of the Iranian nuclear programme was seen as one of the main obstacles to a WMDFZ in the Middle East. Israel and Saudi Arabia

questioned Iran's commitment to the deal, and argued it should have "included elements to limit what they regard as hostile Iranian regional behaviour", causing a rift.[14] President Trump withdrew the US from the deal in 2018 and re-imposed damaging sanctions, which saw Iran stepping away from its commitments, throwing the Zone into more confusion as threats between Israel and Iran resumed. In the last few weeks, the Head of The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi prepared to report to the IAEA that "his agreements to monitor Iran's nuclear programme had in effect collapsed" however on the 12th of September 2021, Iran agreed to resume "monitoring and inspection processes."[15]

In terms of efforts to overcome these obstacles, a process of realising the zone would need to take into account threat perceptions of all regional states to cover security concerns. There needs to be a desire to address shared security challenges through a 'parallel process', and to secure confidence-building measures.[16] In *A Middle East Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction: A New Approach to Non-proliferation*, Kiyaei and Mousavian advise a gradual phased process, followed by CBM, regional cooperation and "verification mechanisms for disarmament, and culminating in the sequenced accession of all regional states to the various global non-proliferation treaty frameworks".[17] In terms of Israel, credible efforts would need to address the threats that have led Israel to develop nuclear weapons in the first place and "bring Egypt, Iran and Israel to the table (any table) to begin discussions on their respective security concerns".[18]

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Overcoming the "trust deficit" to achieve the Zone

Noor Hammad

The primary obstacle facing the establishment of the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (hence forth, "the Zone") is political and diplomatic, including what has been referred to as a "trust deficit" between nations.[1] While many have focused on the importance of diplomatic recognition and normal relations between the relevant states, the key difficulty is not solely the product of the political differences in ideology of the governments of this region, but rather, the lack of political awareness and engagement across the region. It is this internal facet which presents the key barrier to the establishment of the Zone to the extent that government policies are designed to give effect to the wills of the electorate.[2] While weapons of mass destruction are held by a number of states across the region, this essay will focus on nuclear programmes, and in particular on the Israeli weapons arsenal given that it is not subject to the same international scrutiny as the Iranian nuclear programme.

Despite a longstanding reputation for "robust authoritarianism" which disregards the public opinion pervading the region, the Arab Spring of 2010 demonstrated that despite the irrelevance of an electorate, international and internal reputations were of paramount importance to national governments.[3] As a result, some governments' policymaking can be understood in relation to reputational damage control. The Bahraini government, for example, took the novel step to establish an international commission, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), setting precedent in terms of openness to external evaluation and transparency, with the government "[hoping] to utilize the report as a catalyst for implementing political reforms".[4]

While the Arab street may not be what it was at the height of Nasserism, it is problematic to assume that its youth are apolitical as resistance is ever present and polls demonstrate a politically aware youth, committed to causes such as the Palestinian cause.[5] This is evidenced in the case of the recent normalisation deals between the UAE, Bahrain, and Israel via the Abraham Accords.[6] While international coverage presents the image of a muted public, a quote of the late King Faisal of Saudi Arabia expressing his support for the Palestinian cause was trending in social media of the region.[7] Protests also took place in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar.[8] This indicates that the lack of engagement concerning the proposed Zone may be a product of public ignorance and limited coverage, not apathy. Indeed, the 2019/20 Arab Opinion Index does not include the threat of nuclear warfare as a category among those threats facing the Arab public at large.[9] In fact, no weapons of mass destruction are listed as a threat despite their historical use and existing regional stockpiles.[10]

Rather than contributing to their general sense of malaise as seen in the Arab Youth Survey, the international community should be taking action to amplify youth voices and support the operations of local civil society organisations without subsuming their local character.[11] In other words, expertise and training may be provided to such societies, but the aim and implementation methods chosen must remain strictly tailored to the local community as defined by local civil society organisations.

Despite having possessed an arsenal for a substantial period of time, the Israeli state is not any safer than it was at its inception.

While promoting the cause of denuclearisation among Arab youth is key to the progress of the Zone, competence building is particularly necessary in Israel

given its official policy of calculated "strategic ambiguity".[12] The Israeli government stonewalls topical discourse, from the existence of the Israeli arsenal, to public health and safety concerns such as the age of the Dimona reactor, the humanitarian impact on those in the Negev who are exposed to the toxic radiation, and the risks posed to both Israeli and Palestinian society at large.[13] The current approach taken towards the Israeli reluctance to make progress on the denuclearisation campaign, as with that undertaken in response to its violations of international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), has largely been one of appeasement. For example, the Arab states compromised at the IAEA by agreeing not to put forth a motion concerning the Israeli arsenal in exchange for Israel maintaining the consensus.[14] Despite these compromises, the official Israeli policy remains unchanged, and while Israel has made headway in terms of normalisation, and thus its security concerns, broader regional concerns are not being addressed. Tellingly, despite promising to temporarily halt settlements in the OPT in line with the Abraham Accords, no such halt has materialised.[15] This undermines the argument that peace must precede disarmament.

Furthermore, the military asymmetry produced by the very fact of Israel's possession of nuclear weapons is itself an obstacle to peace in a region which has seen Israel exercise force beyond its borders: in Syria, Lebanon, and Iran to name a few. For the purposes of the Zone, this situation is untenable. While the Gulf Arab states, Morocco, and Sudan may be willing to normalise, key regional players such as Iran are much less likely to do so. In particular, it should be noted that none of the states which newly normalised ties with Israel are on Israel's borders, and they all seek to improve their relationship with the USA in return for economic or political incentives. Other states, such as Syria, whose Golan Heights remain under Israeli occupation, have prioritised their relation-

ship with Russia and do not feel the same need to normalise as a result. Conceivably, tying disarmament to normalisation will simply produce yet another regional stalemate on the matter.

Changing this situation will therefore require internal pressure rather than external pressure. Given the nature of the Israeli collective psyche, traumatised by the experiences of the Holocaust and the creation of a nation through war and colonisation, removing what is perceived as a safeguard will be difficult to enforce, particularly given the Israeli policy of calculated ambiguity.[16] However, there have been some positive indications of future change, from the first admission in the Knesset that Israel possesses nuclear weapons to its first ever-public debate on nuclear weapons and the work of the Israeli Disarmament Movement in breaking the Israeli taboo.[17] Thus, interrogating the notion of nuclear power as a safeguard is critical to changing Israeli public opinion and would allow for the eventual mobilisation of the electorate in favour of dismantling nuclear facilities. This includes the recognition that it was Israeli nuclearisation which prompted today's nuclear threats in Iran, and the developing threats in Saudi Arabia and the UAE and that despite having possessed an arsenal for a substantial period of time, the Israeli state is not any safer than it was at its inception.

On the contrary, the proliferation of nuclear programmes increases the risk of catastrophe, such as by the attack of an armed group or a technical malfunction. Moreover, in dismantling its programme, Israel could set off a domino effect leading to Iran curtailing its civil nuclear programme, reducing both Tehran's perceived threat to Israel, and Israel's perceived threat to many Arab states.[18] Combined internal and external pressure to change and establish a WMD-free zone is necessary in order to ensure long-term safety and security within the wider region.

In conclusion, there is much work to be done across the Middle East to raise awareness of the threat of nuclear weapons and the need for compromise by all parties involved. Israeli society must come to realise that peace and safety comes not from military occupation or the policing of neighbourhoods, but rather from a just peace deal with the Palestinians, recognising their historical and legal rights to the land. Such a deal would finally allow Middle Eastern countries to normalise their relationship with Israel. To this end, progress on the establishment of the Zone presents an avenue that demonstrates to untrusting neighbours that Israel is serious in its attempts to secure regional peace for all. As for Arab societies, they must educate themselves about peacebuilding and understand that the humanitarian impacts of an Israeli or Iranian nuclear disaster would be catastrophic and cannot be confined to political borders.

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Four key obstacles for the Zone and efforts to overcome them

Sara Al-Sayed

This paper highlights four obstacles to the establishment of the Zone: the disagreement between Israel and the other states in the region over the primacy of regional security over disarmament; geopolitical conflicts that give way to foreign – even great power – intervention; the lack of universalization within the region of the relevant treaties; the lack of a regional security framework or organization and of regional cross-issue cooperation. The paper also discusses some of the efforts that could be construed as advancing the Zone project.

The precursor project to the ME WMDFZ, henceforth alternatively referred to here and therein this paper as 'the Zone', was a ME NWFZ. It was based on a proposal by Egypt put before the UN General Assembly in 1974 and backed by Iran. It was motivated by growing apprehension of Israel's expanding military might, not least its nuclear weapons programme, ambiguities around which had surfaced in the 1960s.[1] Hovering over all efforts ever since has been the disagreement over the primacy of disarmament in the region as opposed to the primacy of the recognition of Israel by the region's states and normalized, peaceful relations among them.[2] The Arab states as well as Iran have historically insisted on Israel's disarmament as the precondition for recognition, normalization, and peace.

Delivering the most tangible assurance of good will, disarmament would be the sole means to establish the requisite trust among the region's states so that they could confidently proceed with the pursuit of peaceful relations. Israel perceives the insistence on disarmament as a sign of bad faith on the part of its rivals.

Those rivals are in Israel's view supposedly intent on singling it out and stripping it of security rights of a special scope rendered necessary and legitimate by the tumultuous circumstances that presided over the creation of the Jewish state. This fundamental disagreement constitutes the first obstacle to the establishment of the Zone.

There is little doubt, then, that the Palestinian question has played a role, implicitly or explicitly, in framing progress over the Zone. In fact, the breakdown of the peace process that was ushered in by the Oslo Accords in the nineties represents one of many examples of geopolitical tensionsin the region that constitute obstacles to the creation of the Zone. A cynic might therefore judge the U.S.-brokered 2020 Abraham Accords between Israel and four Arab states (the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Morocco, and Bahrain) to represent progress in the form of advancing peace and partially fulfilling the Israeli precondition for prospective disarmament. But in return for normalization, the Accords come with not only economic gains for the Arab parties, but military and strategic gains as well. So not only are the Accords anticipated to further hinder the two-state solution striven for by the Oslo process, but they threaten to multiply the security dilemmas in an already volatile region that has given way over the decades to proxy conflicts on multiple fronts and not without the intervention of great powers.

Disarmament would be the sole means to establish the requisite trust among the region's states so that they could confidently proceed with the pursuit of peaceful relations.

On the other hand, one may argue that with at least a handful of Arab states enjoying a peace treaty with Israel, it will become harder and harder for Israel

to justify its continued tenacity. So the Abraham Accords might not end up being that huge an obstacle after all. Other signs of easing tensions in the region bolster hope in progress as well: recent Saudi–Iranian rapprochement, recent attempts at reviving talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, and Iran permitting the IAEA to resume monitoring activities under its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, which potentially promises a less bleak fate for the JCPOA under the two new administrations in Iran and the U.S.

Nevertheless, ultimately there remains the issue that the treaties of relevance to the establishment of the Zone – the NPT, BTWC, CWC, and CTBT – don't all enjoy universalization within the region.[3] There is little chance that a WMD disarmament project would progress without the relevant treaties being signed and ratified by all states in the region. After all, treaties are legally binding for their members and through compliance and enforcement mechanisms furnish the grounds for confidence building among the members. But from the point of view of ME states, the NPT Review Conferences since 1995 have progressively proved to be an inadequate venue for advancing their causes. Things came to a head in the 2015 NPT Review Conference with objections by the U.S., the U.K., and Canada to calls by the Arab Group to go forward with the Conference on the ME WMDFZ that had failed to take place in 2012 – due to U.S. withdrawal – and for Israel to join the NPT.[4]

In order to break the impasse within the NPT framework, calls were made by the Arab states at the UN First Committee for the Secretary General to convene the ME WMDFZ Conference as of 2019 and annually thereafter, the 2020 edition not having taken place due to the pandemic. This move never met with the approval of Israel and the U.S., however, who boycotted the 2019 edition, with concerns over the legitimacy of this alternative pathway.[5] And yet, it may be that the ME WMDFZ Conference as well as informal workshops, such as those by

the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs in 2020 and 2021 (which were not attended by Israel and the U.S.) addressing best practices to approach conceptual, technical, legal, and administrative issues, will lay the groundwork for a future ME WMDFZ treaty that would gain all parties' approval.

This brings me to the final obstacle I discuss in this paper, namely, the lack of a regional security framework or organization through which all ME states could address security issues and generate cooperative solutions. The League of Arab States is a cross-issue platform that excludes Iran and Israel; the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) excludes Arab non-Gulf states as well as Iran and Israel, though it could benefit from cooperation with at least Iran on issues of common interest by way of alleviating enduring Persian Gulf tensions. Generally, a lock-in in state security discourse can be observed in the region, obscuring the inextricably connected human security concerns that may be better addressed through regional multilateral efforts towards socioeconomic and political development. This would help build bridges and foster trust that would in turn positively impact the prospects for the Zone.[6]

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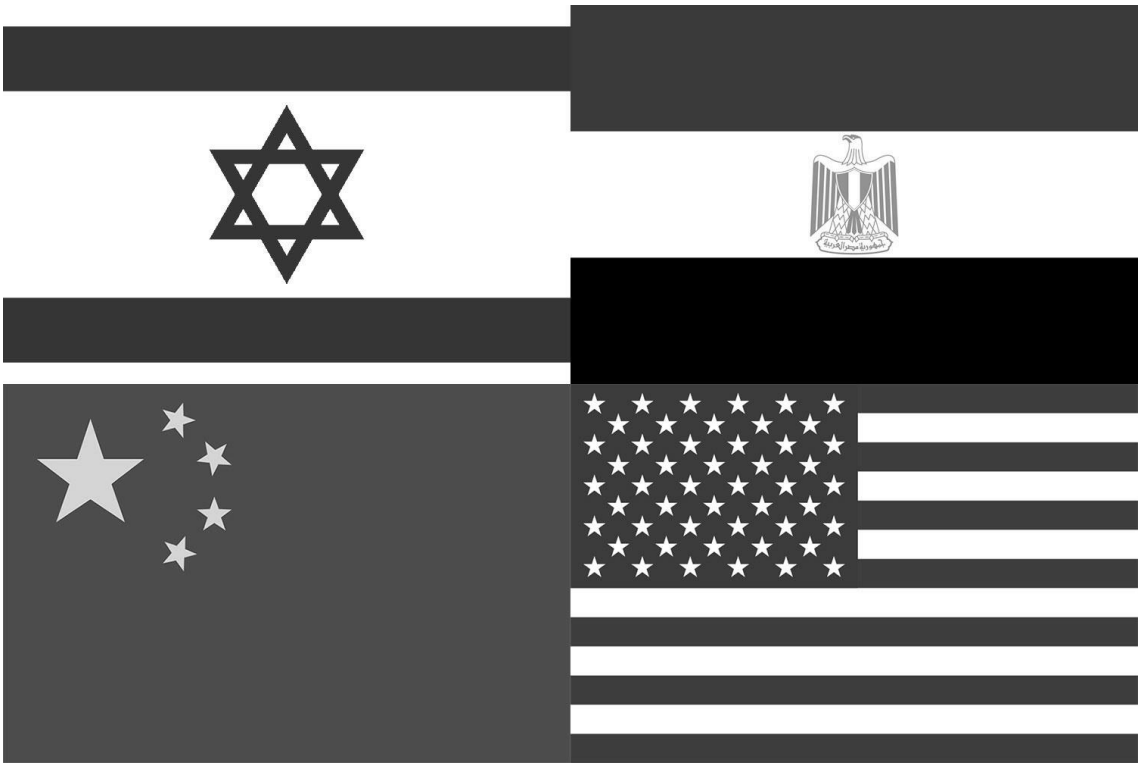
State perspectives on the Zone

What is the position of Israel, Egypt, China and the United States on the WMDFZ and WMD non-proliferation conventions?

What do these states consider to be the main obstacle(s) in the path towards realizing the Zone?

What solution(s) have these countries provided to overcome these obstacles?



Israel & a WMD Free Zone: position, obstacles and solutions

Antonios Eskander

"I am convinced that the State of Israel needs a defence research programme of its own, so that we shall never again be as lambs led to the slaughter." David Ben Gurion, first Prime Minister of Israel[1]

Israel stands out in the Middle East. It has the spottiest convention signing record in the region, having not signed the BWC nor ratified the CTBT or the CWC, while also being the sole non-signatory of the NPT in the region. Israel's possession of nuclear weapons is an open secret. How did Israel get here, and how might it move forward? This essay will explore the origin and motivations of Israel's long-standing deterrence policy of *amimut*, its effect on proliferation in the region, and the reasons Israel perceives *amimut* to be a preferable policy to disarmament.

Israel's desire for nuclear weapons is connected to the national memory of the holocaust, which is so pervasive in contemporary Israeli life.[2] A particular Zionist narrative about the holocaust – that a strong Jewish state is necessary for the Jewish people – was influential among early figures in the political establishment who pushed for the bomb, such as scientist Ernst David Bergman[3] and politician David Ben Gurion.[4] This siege mentality has never left the Israeli security establishment, as evidence by the constancy of the enduring *amimut* policy, which even withstood fantastic pressure from the Americans during the period of acquisition under Yitzhak Rabin's time as Foreign Minister.[5]

The official Israeli position is that it will not "introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East", a mantra first used by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in 1963

that continues to be echoed by contemporary Israeli politicians like Netanyahu.[6] This mantra is the core of the long-standing Israeli policy of *amimut*, a strategy that aims to achieve the security promised by deterrence theory while also avoiding provoking its neighbours to proliferate.[7] Contrary to Israel's official posture, it is an accepted fact among experts that Israel possesses enough nuclear warheads to destroy every major city in the Middle East, although estimates on their exact number vary significantly (in 2014, most sources varied between 75 to 400).[8]

Only when enemies are not seen everywhere, and history is no longer read as a mandate for distrust, can the Israeli state begin to participate, in good faith, in the regional dialogues that can bring about a new era of cooperation in the Middle East.

While the Israeli public is not willing to discuss nuclear weapons, it is convinced of their necessity. According to 2012 polls, the Israeli public sees Iran as a hostile existential threat to Israel, a threat which is articulated in terms of the holocaust.[9] In the national discourse, national security for Israelis is tantamount to averting future holocausts. Indeed, the perception of the Iranian threat is not limited to the Israeli public, but is also prevalent in the security establishment. A panel at Tel Aviv University about nuclear threats in the Middle East focused entirely on Iran, and strategies to invade Iran – while not at all considering or acknowledging the role of Israeli weapons in the conflict.[10] This is the domestic dimension of *amimut:* as well as denying the existence of Israeli nuclear weapons to outsiders, *amimut* includes the taboo against acknowledging Israeli weapons which exists among the elite and the public.

Paradoxically, while Israel holds out for a more secure region before disarming, Israel's nuclear weapons are a major obstacle themselves, since they serve as a catalyst for proliferation. Israel's relationship with Egypt makes an interesting case study. In an effort to balance against Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons, Egypt invested and acquired CW capabilities in 1950s, which it eventually used in Yemen in the 1960s.[11] This may have led to further proliferation due to allegations that Egypt aided Iraq's development of CW in the 1980s.[12] Although a nuclear weapon never materialised, Egypt's efforts in this area in the 1960s are attributable to Nasser's discovery of – and alarm at – the Israeli nuclear programme.[13] Egypt continues to refrain from signing the CWC and ratifying the BWC, insisting that Israel must first sign onto the NPT.[14] Thus as Egypt and Israel's other neighbours attempt to balance against Israel's weapons, Israel's nuclear capability is directly and indirectly fuelling militarisation and WMD proliferation in the region.

Israel has not been cooperative when it feels the discourse on regional security is focussed on its nuclear weapons, as it showed at the first committee of the UNGA in 2018. There, Israel voted against numerous resolutions concerning WMDs in the Middle East, claiming the resolution calling for the November conference was "unilateral" on the part of the Arab nations, and attempt to "single out Israel".[15] Israel discredited its neighbours' resolutions, arguing that they have violated their international obligations under the NPT, and emphasising the threat that Iran's missile programme presents to Israel. Israel takes issue with disarmament processes like the TPNW which do not address the security situation Israel faces, presumably given the enormous role nuclear weapons play in Israel's security doctrine. Despite Israel's claims in the UN to be seeking constructive dialogue, Israel may be content with the status quo, feeling that its *amimut* deterrence strategy guarantees its security better than through multilateral means.

Changing the deterrence logic that has prevailed in Israel's security thinking for more than 60 years is no easy task. It will require lifting the siege in the mind of the Israeli public and its government, which sees foes and conflict to be a historical necessity, and a strong military a necessary evil. Dismantling this attitude will require the détente of hostilities between Iran and Israel and the establishment of a robust alternative in multilateralism and disarmament in the public discourse. Only when enemies are not seen everywhere, and history is no longer read as a mandate for distrust, can the Israeli state begin to participate, in good faith, in the regional dialogues that can bring about a new era of cooperation in the Middle East.

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Israeli Perspective on a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East

Akshat Sharma

Israeli motives, policy and strategic approach in relation to nuclear disarmament have always been clouded with ambiguity and a sense of insecurity during efforts for cooperation. Moreover, Israel has not signed any of the significant treaties and conventions against the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). It is not a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Biological and Toxin Weapons Conventions (BTWC) nor the Missile Technology Control Regime. While it has signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), it has ratified neither of them.[1]

Contextual Understanding of Israel in relation to WMD discourse

With the context of the Czech-Egyptian Arms deal in 1955 and the 1956 Suez Crisis, France and Israel discovered each other's shared interests. Another motivation for France to cooperate in secrecy was to avoid US-led worldwide attention towards its intention of nuclear armament.[2] France rolled in and created an IRR-2 (Israeli Research Reactor-2) at Dimona for the production of weapons-grade plutonium. They honed in on Dimona for the creation of an autonomous nuclear research plan with the construction of the Negev Nuclear Research Centre around IRR-2.[3] The United States initially became conscious about Israeli nuclear motives in Dimona when an "American Corporate Official" had hinted at such intentions. Moreover, the US Embassy officials had also pointed out probable intentions of concealing what was going on at Dimona. However, the US failed to act upon the obvious red flags and then-president

Dwight Eisenhower reportedly chose to remain oblivious to such findings.[4]

Since Israel's distrust stems from the isolating, antagonizing and ostracising treatment that it has historically faced, the state will likely never feel comfortable committing to disarmament until they perceive a change in behaviour of other regional states.

The major breakthrough within international discourse was through the revelations made by a former technician from Dimona, John Crossman (previously known as Mordechai Vanunu) to the Times of London. Israel's scathing response to the story was to accuse the media outlet of 'abducting' Vanunu and creating a fictitious narrative against the state. Later on, Vanunu was abducted by Mossad agents, brought back to Israel and charged with treason and espionage with an 18-year sentence.[5] There was an apparent inconsistency between the Israeli statement (to the Times of London report) and their consequent actions of charging Vanunu of espionage and treason. Broad assumptions have been made about an estimate of Israel's nuclear arsenal, but according to legitimate sources, Israel is believed to possess at least 90 warheads and to have the capacity to build around 100-200 total.[6]

In the context of Biological and Chemical Weapons, Israel has been suspected of furthering objectives of chemical and biological offensive infrastructure. Such suspicions of research are largely centred on the Israeli Institute of Biological Research. Moreover, there have been instances of bioterrorism drills being carried out which indicates a desire for defensive preparedness in the wake

of such an attack on Israel.[7] Under this context, they may be driven with research to acquire chemical and biological weapons of their own. However, like the nuclear opacity policy, there isn't much explicit admittance by the state to be pursuing such an objective.

Roadblocks within Disarmament Discourse - How to move forward?

Israel's rationale to acquire WMD critical infrastructure stems from the regional context of conflict, distrust and animosity that surrounds it. While Israel has had a history of conflict with all countries that it borders, (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestinian Territories of West Bank and Gaza) it has always had regional insecurity with all Arab countries within the region. This insecurity not only pushes the state to acquire weapons of mass destruction but also incentivises it to maintain ambiguous secrecy surrounding such plans and intentions. The political mood in Israel has always indicated the need for WMD infrastructure as a necessary evil but a 'last resort' method to opt as a deterrence strategy (known as the Samson Option).[8]

Since Israel's distrust stems from the isolating, antagonizing and ostracising treatment that it has historically faced, the state will likely never feel comfortable committing to disarmament until they perceive a change in behaviour of other regional states. Addressing the UNGA Resolution to commit to a "Conference on Establishing a Middle East WMD Free Zone" (also known as the November Conference), Israel voted against it and called the resolution 'unilateral' and 'destructive'.[9] Israel raised objections towards the resolution for the establishment of the November Conference because it believed that the procedure and discourse that led to consensus on such an initiative never involved Israel, which furthers the Israeli belief of facing isolation and constant danger within the region. The November Conference has been an attractive prospect towards the creation of a regional treaty within the Middle East, and it recorded progress in

its first session itself. However, the absence of Israel will always raise questions on the validity and legitimacy of any conclusion from such a conference that does not include a regional state strongly assumed to possess WMD infrastructure.

Israel's apprehensions in getting involved within peacebuilding processes leads to its call for states to establish regional peace before moving towards a resolution on disarmament. Arab states led by Egypt urge that peace will likely follow after shared commitment towards a resolution. While this discourse is a redundant deadlock, regional states should take part in "Confidence Building Measures" (CBM) to build trust. This also entails Israel reciprocating to promote further progress in such measures.

The Stimson Centre's paper on CBMs in the Arab-Israeli progress identified progress in four significant CBM areas in the 1994-95 Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Working Group sessions.[10] At its May 1994 Doha plenary session, two-fold progress was made in establishing a "Regional Communications Network" and garnering broad support for talks on a "Regional Security Centre". Maritime Security measures like collective search and rescue operations were discussed heavily at the March 1995 session. Lastly, the ACRS participants also agreed to pre-notify members of the mobilization of more than 1400 troops and 110 tanks in the region. While all these aspects created a lot of room for discussion, ACRS was redundant due to the political posturing of member states. Such manufactured obstacles reiterate the need for Track II diplomacy measures where regional collectivization on common ground is devoid of political posturing due to the involvement of non-governmental organizations (such as Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, International Crisis Group, etc.). While immediate results are a far-fetched expectation from states driven by animosity for each other, acknowledgement of differences and receptiveness within discourse will likely facilitate such processes.

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Egypt and the WMDFZ in the Middle East

Hadir Mamdouh

A NWFZ for the Middle East and North Africa was first formally proposed by Egypt in 1974, with backing from Iran, in the form of a joint resolution to the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Until recently, Egypt had been the most active advocate of the Middle East WMDFZ since its inception. Egypt's refusal to take part in further discussions regarding regional security unless the issue were put on the agenda contributed to the breakdown of the 1992–95 ACRS talks.[1] Less than a year later, Egypt campaigned heavily on behalf of the Arab group states to secure the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East as a precondition for their vote on the indefinite extension of the NPT. Egypt also made less successful attempts at strong-arming international forums to move the process forward.[2]

The official reason for Egypt's active support of the Middle East WMDFZ is given as the elimination of the Middle Eastern WMD threat, but the realities on the ground and Egypt's behaviour throughout the process suggest its motivations are not so straightforward. In the early to mid-1990s, a reasonable case could be made that the proposal was not only aimed at the Israeli nuclear arsenal but was prompted by the development and, in some cases, use of WMD by other regional states including Iraq and Syria. However, since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons in 2013 and the conclusion of the JCPOA, it has become difficult to argue that Israel is not the focus of Arab efforts on this front.

Despite Egypt having been at the vanguard of the Middle East WMDFZ effort

from early on, it has not signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) or the IAEA's Additional Protocol, nor has it ratified treaties that it has already signed: the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, also known as the Treaty of Pelindaba. Cairo ratified the NPT in 1981 (which it had signed in 1968), and its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) entered into force the following year.

Egypt has been a vocal critic of the NPT for its lack of universality, and has supported a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, citing Israel's non-accession to the NPT as an obstacle to this process. Not all countries in the Middle East see the utility nor support the normative benefits of a WMDFZ, highlighting the need to approach it within a wider context. Continuing to think that this process is primarily about establishing such a zone without addressing the primary interests of those countries involved has led to a process that is not transparent and has limited the prospects for success. This is evident from the discrepancy between the policies and postures of the two most prominent parties in the negotiations, Egypt (representing the Arab states) and Israel. Egypt wants to close the gap in WMD capabilities between the states of the region and specifically highlights Israel's nuclear programme. Israel, in contrast, sees the negotiations as an opportunity to engage directly with the Arab states and pave the way for the normalization of ties between them.

Egypt claims this is in order to retain the use of its pending ratifications as leverage over Israel's refusal to join the NPT.[3] Efforts to persuade Egypt to sign and ratify the CWC as a confidence-building measure have stalled, as it claims that it already brings enough to the negotiating table with its existing membership of the NPT and signatory status on other arms control treaties. Egypt faces different security challenges, like domestic unrest, as its struggling economy might lead to a renewed revolution like during the Arab Spring. In

2020, Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry said that Egypt demands the total elimination of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, and the establishment of a regional nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ). He added that Egypt is worried about the failure to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East in accordance with the decision issued in the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).[4]

Shoukry said Egypt hopes the next review conference will adopt a balanced final document that reaffirms commitment to previous resolutions, including the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, in light of the consensus reached at the UN in 2019 to establish such a zone.[5] He emphasized that "the path must be unconditional." The failure to universalize the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is significantly eroding the credibility of disarmament and non-proliferation regimes, as well as international norms.[6]

Efforts to persuade Egypt to sign and ratify the CWC as a confidence-building measure have stalled, as it claims that it already brings enough to the negotiating table with its existing membership of the NPT and signatory status on other arms control treaties.

In *Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in Middle East*, Shai Feldman identifies the main difference between proposed Israeli and Egyptian texts on the NWFZ as "the mechanism by which an NWFZ should be established in the Middle East. The Egyptian draft resolutions do 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."[7] 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.

A second distinction between the two proposals is their approach to the NPT and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. The Egyptian proposal suggested that pending the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East, the region's states should adhere to the stipulations of the NPT and should subject all facilities to IAEA safeguards. Nabil Fahmy, a member of Egypt's delegation, said that nuclear weapon states would have to be verified by intrusive measures. "Verification will, of course, have to be commensurate with the requirements for making the zone truly nuclear-weapons free".

In conclusion, Egypt had been the most active advocate of the Middle East WMDFZ, and ratified the NPT in 1981. Yet the country remains concerned about the failure to establish any zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Egypt hopes for a balanced final commitment to previous resolutions, including the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East, in light of the consensus reached at the UN in 2019 to establish such a zone.

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A WMDFZ in the Middle East: An Egyptian Perspective

Sabrina Tripodi

Egypt's nuclear posture is often seen as "an interesting case".[1] Egypt, the most populated country in the Arab world, historically viewed as "a leader in the pan-Arab movement", has often been expected to develop a nuclear weapons programme.[2] Egypt would indeed have great national security justification for doing so. In the 1960s, international media revealed that the French government was providing assistance to Israel "in establishing a nuclear reactor in Dimona".[3] This discovery placed the Israeli nuclear issue on Egypt's political-security agenda to this day. This security concern has been worsened by the broad economic and diplomatic warfare between Cairo and Tel Aviv, but also by Egypt's self-perception of leadership and prestige in the Arab world. However, after unsuccessfully having tried to acquire nuclear weapons from the Soviet Union and China in the late 1960s, Egypt opted instead for chemical and biological capabilities, as well as missile acquisition and development.[4]

Having forfeited the nuclear weapons option, Egypt began to lead non-proliferation efforts, specifically committing to advance President Mubarak's call in 1990 for the establishment of a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East.[5] These efforts have strengthened the case that the Egyptian leadership is not acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).[6] In this essay I will analyse the obstacles Egypt faced when pursuing the acquisition of the 'nuclear option', the nation's shift towards its commitment to the WMDFZ in the Middle East, the motivations pushing Egypt to support the establishment of the Zone, and finally will conclude with Cairo's contemporary situation.

In his article, Gawdat Bahgat brilliantly exposes the hardships faced by the Egyptian government while trying to access nuclear weapons in collaboration with foreign powers. In the 1960s, "Egypt was particularly interested in acquiring nuclear weapons to counter Israel's nascent and growing nuclear programme in Dimona".[7] Yet Cairo's attempt was unsuccessful, the Soviet Union and China having denied Egypt's requests. After the disastrous 1967 war with Israel, Egypt's "nuclear strategy was transformed". The consequences of the Six-Day War in 1967 were not only political and military, but also economic. In addition, at this time, Soviet-Egyptian relations were growing ever closer. A Soviet presence in Egypt started to grow after the Egyptian monarchy was ousted in 1952. Egypt made a clear turn towards the Soviet Union after the United States refused to deliver it weapons in 1955.[8] Nasser further cemented relations with the Soviet Union by adopting national planning and moved closer to the socialist model of economic development. This decision led Western powers and international banks to delay or reject Egypt's requests for loans and other financial assistance, forcing the Egyptian government to replace them with Soviet support.[9] It is in this context that Egypt became increasingly dependent on Soviet economic and military support, and a key focal point for Soviet policy in the Middle East.

The Six-Day War in 1967 saw Egypt's economy considerably weakened and this trend continued even more so after Egypt's involvement in the Yemeni war. Egypt's battered economy represented a severe obstacle to any attempt of 'going nuclear'. The relations between Cairo and Moscow also started to fade in 1972 with the rise of Egypt's then President Sadat, who expelled the Soviet military advisors and began to make overtures towards the United States following the failed 1973 October War with Israel.[10]

Barnes-Dacey et al. (2018) explain the Soviet Union's failure in the region through four reasons. The first reason is the "nationalist narrative" on which

"the (Egyptian) independence has been largely won."[11] While communism was based on the expectation that it would lead to the end of nation states, "Arab nationalism exerted a far stronger appeal" in the region. The second links to communism's focus on the working class. Particularly since the overwhelming majority of Arabs worked in the agricultural sector, the Marxist narrative, with its emphasis on the factory worker, only applied to a minority group.[12] The third reason is based on "the strongly anti-religious discourse of communism" that was in direct opposition with conservative Islamic societies. The final reason is that the Soviet Union did not take a firm position in the Arab-Israeli conflict, in particular during the June 1967 war.[13]

Roger E. Kanet and Usha Venkatesan propose another explanation for Moscow's decline in the region. They argue that "the Soviet refusal to provide the Egyptian army with the military equipment which the latter demanded" is an important factor in "the major shift in Soviet-Egyptian relations."[14] Sadat's fear "that a Soviet-American détente might result in reduced Soviet support for national liberation movements and for the Arabs" also appears important. While the position of the United States fell among Arab states during the 1950s and 1960s, it emerged as the leading external actor in the Arab-Israeli negotiations following the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. This implied a "virtual elimination of a Soviet role in the peace negotiations", most evident in the case of Egypt, which by late 1977 had severed ties with the Soviet Union.[15] In the mid-1970s, President al-Sadat launched the *Infitah*, Egypt's programme of economic liberalization, which "coincided with massive American economic and military aid". The US foreign assistance, however, came with constraints based on the "norms and rules dictated by the international system and the United States". These obligated the country to respect these norms and rules so as to not imperil the foreign sources of income. Egypt had to abandon the 'nuclear option' once again.[16]

Gawdat Bahgat (2007) names the Egyptian leadership as another obstacle to the acquisition of nuclear weapons. None of the previous presidents (Gamal Abd al-Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak) have shown the necessary "strong commitment to pursue such an option".[17] This appears to be the case with contemporary leader Abdel Fattah al-Sissi, who instead focuses on pursuing nuclear energy.[18] In fact, various other prerequisites essential to accede to nuclear weapons were lacking, in particular sustaining substantial financial and human resources. For such resources to be allocated would require determined political will from the Egyptian leadership. Such backing has been missing from the equation as the Egyptian leaders "have never been convinced that acquiring nuclear weapons would serve Egypt's national interests (...) a nuclear option was too costly and the benefits were too little."[19]

These repeated failures in Egypt's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons pushed the country to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in July 1968 and to start "championing the call for making the entire Middle East a nuclear weapons free zone".[20] As several scholars have shown, Egypt's hope in signing the NPT in 1968 was to "put pressure on Israel to follow suit".[21] These researchers have also linked Egypt's call for a WMDFZ in the Middle East to the nation's attempt to enhance its national prestige and Middle Eastern leadership role. The Israeli and Iranian issues, as well as the Iraqi one in the past, are indeed perceived by Egypt as the main obstacles towards both its stature in the Middle East (and to a greater extent in the world) and the path towards realizing a WMDFZ in the region.[22]

As previously noted, in the 1960s the world was made aware of French assistance to Israel in building a nuclear reactor in Dimona, placing this affair at the very centre of Egypt's political and security agenda. Indeed, the Israeli nuclear issue represents a "multidimensional threat" to Egypt.[23] Cairo has often expressed the traditional threat the Israeli nuclear capability might pose not only

to Egypt, but to the entire Middle East. However, Shimon Stein argues that "the direct threat to Egypt inherent in Israel's nuclear capability is less severe than Israel's superiority in the areas of science, technology, and economy". Tel-Aviv's superiority in the nuclear field "exposes Egypt's inferiority and inability to remedy it" and "constitutes a blow to Egypt's self-image".[24] Emily Landau raises a similar point, arguing that Egypt saw the nuclear issue as a path toward consolidating its leadership position in the Arab world, and that "Egypt's interest in the nature of the Middle East once peace agreements have been achieved - in this future Middle East, Israel would most likely be Egypt's foremost rival for regional power, and Egypt was reluctant to reach this stage with Israel as a nuclear power".[25]

In order to confront this obstacle, in 1960 Egypt began to threaten a preventive war by targeting Israel's nuclear installations.[26] However, Nasser never materialized this threat, presumably due to Israel's military superiority. Another solution envisaged by the Egyptian leadership has been its failed attempts to acquire nuclear capabilities from foreign powers. These events marked Egypt's shift towards calling for a WMDFZ in the Middle East, "lobby(ing) Israel to sign the NPT and dismantle its nuclear weapons and (...) [at the same time] to pursue other kinds of WMDs, particularly chemical weapons" and missiles. [27]

The solution chosen by Egypt to realize the Zone and disarm Israel took place within the diplomatic arena.[28] This diplomatic 'war' has been centred on the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly First Committee, the UN General Assembly, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the NPT Conference. The country circulated several "motions and reports published at the IAEA and the UN as main tools towards the ostensible goal of establishing a nuclear- and WMD-free zone in the Middle East".[29] Egypt also made many commentaries, statements, and speeches, stressing the necessity for Israel to address its nuclear weapons capabilities by either eliminating it or agree

to international inspections and control.[30] Cairo voiced regional security concerns, claiming that Israel's nuclear capability is a threat for the region and would incite the proliferation of WMDs in the Middle East.

Egypt has also pointed out the West's and the United States of America's "double standard", as Landau explains, "*vis-à-vis* Israel and the Arab States in the non-conventional realm". While imposing a highly intrusive inspection regime on Iraq, the US actively helped Israel in advancing along all aspects of its "perceived qualitative edge".[31] Knowing that it needs the US's backing to fulfil its objective, Egypt has long called for the US to press Israel to join the NPT.[32]

Another solution was to support various US-led initiatives. In May 1991, President George H. W. Bush introduced his Middle East arms control initiative. Egypt accepted the plan but "made it clear that Israel should be included in the implementation of the initiative regarding the need to report on the inventory of nuclear materials in its possession."[33] Cairo also welcomed the American initiative to form the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group, as another multilateral venue for discussing broader regional security issues. However, in 1992, Egyptian foreign minister Amr Moussa expressed the necessity to also deal with the Israeli nuclear issue. Realizing that Egypt's appeal would not be met within the ACRS framework hindered the continuation of the process as it would "endanger Egypt's ability

The Iranian issue, and especially the Israeli nuclear issue, are at the very heart of Egypt's concerns. Both Tel-Aviv and Teheran hover over Egypt's esteem and underline Cairo's nuclear and technological inferiority.

to shape the Arab agenda and as a result, threaten its regional leadership". Ultimately, Egypt halted talks within the ACRS in 1995.[34] Furthermore, after having first opposed the US intention to extend the NPT indefinitely, Egypt accepted it in exchange for the adoption of a resolution on the Middle East.[35] Stein presents this resolution as an Egyptian achievement, as Cairo managed to "firmly insert the Israeli nuclear issue" without mentioning Israel, "and thus transform the issue from an Egyptian-Arab pursuit to an international issue".[36]

Continuing suspicion around Iran's nuclear capabilities has increasingly been perceived as a threat to Egypt and the rest of the Arab states. However, as it is argued to be the case with Israel, it seems that Iran does not pose an immediate threat to Egypt. Rather, Iran is seen as a menace to Egypt's stability and status in the region. Stein posits that Egypt has dealt with the Iranian issue differently due to Egypt's feeling of "ownership in spearheading the Israeli nuclear issue at NPT conferences and at international forums in general".[37] Conversely, the Egyptians view Iran as not only seeking regional dominance but also a fundamental change in the existing regional order that would directly threaten Egypt's political stability.

Egypt's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons were thwarted by three factors: foreign powers rejecting the nation's requests to acquire nuclear weapons; the hardships faced in the economic sector, both under Soviet assistance and after Egypt's shift towards American aid; and the lack of strong commitment from the Egyptian leaders to pursue nuclear weapons. This ultimately led Egypt to champion the call for a WMDFZ in the Middle East as a way to enhance regional security, and to strengthen its national prestige and leadership role in the region. The Iranian issue, and especially the Israeli nuclear issue, are at the very heart of Egypt's concerns. Both Tel-Aviv and Teheran hover over Egypt's esteem and underline Cairo's nuclear and technological inferiority. Finally, Iran poses a new and emerging threat to Egypt as Iran might disrupt the existing regional order.

Contemporary Egypt continues to be perceived as sustaining its leadership role in advocating to establish the WMDFZ and in criticizing Israel's nuclear weapons programme. However, Egypt's reputation is tarnished with suspicion over maintaining a chemical warfare capability and the means of delivery.[38] Scholars seem nonetheless to agree that Egypt "currently views the development of nuclear weapons as contrary to its strategic interests".[39] Finally, the country has ratified the NPT, and has signed but not ratified the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), as well as the Treaty of Pelindaba (or the African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Cairo has so far resisted signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).[40]

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China as a Player in the Middle East

Carter Myers-Brown

As one of nine nuclear weapon states in the world, and one of five permanent members of the UN Security Council, and supplemented with their burgeoning economic dominance, China holds a significant amount of power in the international community. With its economic might and nascent global expansion plans (such as the Belt and Road Initiative), China poses a threat to U.S hegemony.[1] Not only does China's growth challenge the U.S economically, but also geopolitically: one prime example includes China's increasing presence in the Middle East. Over the last couple years, China has developed closer relationships with Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, UAE and others.[2]

With the Belt and Road Initiative, China will develop both economic and diplomatic relations with states such as Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

With fervent tensions abounding throughout the region, questions over the correct path to gain regional security remain in the air. China has publicly supported the establishment of a weapons of mass destruction free zone (WMDFZ) as one path to regional security; the proliferation of nuclear weapons, as well as biological and chemical weapons, provides a veil of power but only exacerbates the security dilemma, and so the support of a major player like China for a WMDFZ could initiate momentum to its realization. However, China's geopolitical interests in the region raise questions over the hope of building such a zone.

China has publicly stated their support for a weapons of mass destruction free zone in the Middle East on several occasions. It is party to the NPT, the BTWC, and the CWC. In a Statement during the 2020 NPT Review Conference on Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones in the Middle East, the Chinese Delegation discussed the importance of non-proliferation in encouraging regional stability and mollifying tensions. They say, "It is necessary to adopt feasible intermediate measures in a step by step manner" and advocate for the support of the international community to help implement such measures.[3] Thus, their solution for achieving the Zone is through multilateral cooperation but also through recognition by the states themselves of the necessity for internal resolution.

China has also supported enterprises presented by the states in the region and has voted affirmatively in the General Assembly for the establishment of a NWFZ every year since 1974.[4] In more specific cases during the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT, China submitted a report articulating the responsibilities of Iran and Israel. It reads, "China always maintains that the nuclear issue in the Islamic Republic of Iran should be solved in a peaceful manner through diplomatic negotiations. To that end, China calls on parties concerned to enhance diplomatic efforts and actively pursue a long-term, comprehensive and proper solution to the Iranian nuclear issue".[5] In a similar vein, it also urges Israel to acquiesce to the NPT and submit their nuclear facilities to IAEA safeguards. Such regional actions also need to be accompanied by external actions: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi declared the "unilateral bullying acts of the United States" subverted non-proliferation aspirations, and that to restore the JCPOA, it is the U.S's responsibility to initiate progress by easing sanctions.[6]

Despite China's publicly stated opinion on a Middle East WMDFZ, its growing presence in the Middle East introduces a new dimension in the geopolitical chess match of the region. With the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China will

develop both economic and diplomatic relations with states such as Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. Between each of these countries there are tensions and differences in agendas, yet each value a partnership with China. The most relevant partnership to a potential WMDFZ is China and Iran's $400 billion deal that features, in return for heavily discounted oil prices, Chinese investment in banking, ports, railways, as well as weapons development/ research and intelligence sharing.[7] Such a deal puts the pressure on the U.S to rekindle the JCPOA, as not only does it alleviate some of the economic harm of U.S sanctions, but also fortifies Iran with the support of a major nuclear weapon power.

China is also the largest customer of Middle Eastern oil, a large portion of which is from Saudi Arabia.[8] China has also financed several ports and industrial parks in Egypt, Oman, U.A.E, Saudi Arabia, and Djibouti, where China holds a military base.[9] Such infrastructure gives it access to strategic points such as the Suez Canal, the Bab el Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. Experts believe these manoeuvres aren't intended to expeditiously establish Chinese hegemony, but advance economic and domestic political goals; these include, respectively, oil and infrastructure enterprises, as well as the absolution of their treatment of the Uyghurs with states in the region.[10] The addition of China as a more prominent player in the region with a political agenda complicates the path forward for security and peace, particularly with the nuclear issue.

China's relationship with Iran, their oil consumption, and the growing BRI questions the power dynamics in the region and what role these dynamics play in the establishment of a WMDFZ. In a region suffering from a preponderance of tensions inhibiting diplomacy and economic cooperation, China has managed to become a common link to many states. Additionally, many of those links have been made in the wake of American failure or dereliction (e.g. Iran,

Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, etc.). Furthermore, in a region plagued by the stagnating effects of power dynamics, China's presence adds more agendas, preferences, and alliances that can further muddle an already complex objective of establishing the Zone.

One could argue that the ability for China to form relationships with these states signifies an important mind-set shift within the region toward the need for stronger diplomatic relations, as such relations are crucial for building the Zone. However, I argue that China's support of states, particularly Iran, could prompt the Middle East to be an arena for a power competition of alliances with great powers at the helm. To compare a future conflict between the U.S and China to the Cold War would be reductionist. The U.S and Russia primarily fought over military power and ideological issues; China and the U.S's relationship is characterized by the tension between their economic and social interconnectedness and a battle for geopolitical power. And so, Middle East countries could further fall victim to their tactics to attain such power.

As revealed over the last two decades of U.S involvement in the Middle East, the interests of the states in the region become secondary to major powers'[11]. Such a dynamic would only magnify security issues and threat perceptions, and further stagnate the diplomacy needed for establishing the Zone. With heavy U.S and Chinese political and economic investment in the region, they both will attempt to steer security aspirations by their momentary interests. And so, while China remains an important player in the region, the path to stability and security must derive from internal sources, from the people that live in the region, so as to break away from the geopolitical chess match of major powers, and build a stable and peaceful climate internally.

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View from Washington D.C.: Nuclear Weapons and the Zone

Soukaina El Anaoui

Since the first appearance of nuclear technology, the world has suffered from many political and environmental problems. The Second World War concluded with a shocking and tragic end: the deployment of atomic weapons. The use of nuclear weapons since that era led to radical decisions.

The United States is one of the so-called P5 countries, five major nuclear-weapons states, which also include the UK, Russia, France and China. All together they possess a massive number of nuclear weapons, currently estimated at about 13,000.[1] As NPT signatory states, each country promised to reduce and dismantle their nuclear weapons, provided the rest of the world commits not to build their own nuclear weapons. Furthermore, they also committed to providing civilian nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. However, those goals never fully came to fruition.[2]

Since 9/11, the United States has instituted a variety of strategic approaches to deal with the use of WMD, in order to combat their spread and protect their national interests from terrorism and other threats.[3] To do so, in 2002, President George W. Bush announced the *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* which describes three important pillars: 1) preventing the proliferation of WMD; 2) protecting with strong non-proliferation measures; and 3) being prepared to use equal force against the enemy if necessary.[4] Following that, in 2003, Bush announced the *National Strategy to Combat Terrorism* and in 2005 the *National Strategy for Maritime Security*. These two announcements focused on several strategies, which were supposed to demonstrate the type of approach

used to ensure safety and protection with allies from the most dangerous threats on land and in the ocean.

The United States maintains that as soon as every other country has committed to sign and ratify all the above treaties, it is willing to do the same.

During the Obama administration, stockpiles of nuclear weapons were cut unilaterally by 553 warheads, reaching 4,018 warheads total, which was the greatest reduction since the Bush administration.[5] This action bolstered US standing in regards to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) for future negotiations with other nuclear-weapons states and increased pressure for new initiatives. However, the reduction of nuclear weapons has been always problematic, especially between the U.S. and Russia. Since the 1970s, bilateral agreements and other measures have been adopted to limit and reduce the proliferation of nuclear warheads.[6] In 2018, President Donald Trump announced the *National Strategy for Countering WMD Terrorism*, which sought to restrict non-state WMD threats such as extremist groups and individuals able to conduct attacks by using nuclear weapons.

As to its position on the Middle East, the United States remains open to creating a WMDFZ, but strictly conditional on other states' demonstrated willingness to commit to the non-proliferation of WMD and the dismantling of said weaponry. The one major country that remains an obstacle in achieving progress on the Zone is Israel, which is on good terms with the US. Pressure on Israel from other countries to dismantle its nuclear weapons is therefore ineffective due to US support.

The US has signed and ratified a wide array of WMD non-proliferation treaties and participated in several related conventions. One of the most important treaties is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), ratified in 1970.[7] In 1995,

the treaty, with 191 party states, was extended indefinitely. Every five years progress is evaluated and further steps agreed upon. The US has signed and in some cases ratified other treaties and agreements regarding WMD, such as the Geneva Protocol, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, with the notable exception of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).[8] The US considers other countries' unwillingness to meet on an equal footing to be a major obstacle to the TPNW, and seeks for other global powers to destroy their stockpiles first.[9]

As one of the five nuclear weapons states party to the NPT, the US does not wish to dismantle their own nuclear weapons or stop their nuclear programmes. Its disarmament agenda chiefly focuses on the question of Russian and Chinese nuclear weapons. They would never consider giving up their own nukes unless other states relinquished their stockpiles. The US also considers that a significant impediment to nuclear reduction relates to the radicalism of some Middle Eastern states, as well as those states' potential intentions to develop a bomb.[10]

Most states in the Middle East do not actively endorse the idea of developing or using a bomb, others, such as Iran, often present difficulties and major differences leading to animosity between the country's radical leadership and the U.S. and Western allies, such as Israel and some European states. This reality has led some in the U.S. administration to question the viability of nuclear nonproliferation in the Middle East. Nevertheless, in 2015 the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was adopted by Iran, the P5 states, Germany and the European Union. In this nuclear deal framework, signatories collectively agreed that Iran would redesign, convert and reduce its nuclear facilities in exchange for the termination of all nuclear-related economic sanctions.[11]

The US's solutions to overcome these obstacles to WMD non-proliferation include negotiating with allies and partners in order to protect themselves from serious threats, including from terrorist groups like ISIS. In addition, the US has offered incentives for the reduction of WMD, for example by gifting new technologies to ally countries that have committed to the NPT. In contrast to those initiatives, the US has provided nuclear technology and cooperation with allies that are not signatory to the NPT, such as India and Israel.[12] Nevertheless, the US has signed most WMD conventions (with the exception of the Treaty-on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as previously pointed out), but it still needs to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. The country maintains that as soon as every other country has committed to sign and ratify all the above treaties, it is willing to do the same.

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