

International Diplomacy Project: Middle East Nuclear Arms Control Regime Conference

Directions: All participants are to read the following information about the background, rules of the simulation, and your country summary. Please meet with your team to devise your negotiation plan as soon as possible. Additional country summaries and bibliographic resources are also provided to help you and your team.

Background

What is a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone?

Nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) agreements are regional agreements that prohibit states from acquiring, developing, or stockpiling nuclear weapons—in short, a geographical area without nuclear weapons.

NWFZs are an important tool in the international nuclear arms control regime. They provide confidence-building measures that enhance regional security and build trust among states in several ways. NWFZs open space for dialogue on other regional security issues, and signal the credibility of peaceful intentions to the international community. They also often include negative security assurances in which states that possess nuclear weapons agree not to use those weapons against non-nuclear states.

There are currently five NWFZs: Treaty of Tlateloco (Latin America), Treaty of Rarotonga (South Pacific), Treaty of Bangkok (Southeast Asia), Treaty of Pelindaba (Africa), and the Treaty on a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia.

Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones and the Middle East

The Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (MENFWZ) has been on the international agenda for almost 40 years. First proposed in a UN Resolution in 1974, the UN General Assembly adopted resolutions annually to reaffirm its commitment to the establishment a NWFZ in the Middle East with a consensus voting in favor since 1980.

In 1991, the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group was established as part of the Madrid Peace Process to build multilateral momentum.

States involved intended to establish confidence-building measures and initiate broad discussion of the MENWFZ. Although a number of confidence-building measures were agreed upon – including maritime issues (search and rescue), pre-notification of military exercises, exchange of military information, a regional communication network, and the establishment of three regional security centers – none were implemented. Talks collapsed in September 1995 as Israel and Egypt disagreed about when to place the MENWFZ on the agenda and whether an Israeli-Arab peace settlement should be a precondition to the MENWFZ.

In 1995, the U.S., the U.K., and Russia spearheaded and adopted a Middle East Resolution in the final document created at the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review and Extension Conference. The resolution called on all states in the Middle East to accede to the NPT, to take practical steps in establishing a verifiable MENWFZ, and to apply all IAEA safeguards to nuclear facilities in the Middle East. Further, the resolution called on all NPT states to extend their cooperation to support the resolution. With the exception of Israel, all states in the Middle East have acceded to the NPT. However, since 1995, no further progress has been made on the Middle East Resolution.

As a follow-up, the final document at the 2010 Review Conference reaffirmed “the importance of Israel’s accession to the Treaty and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards.”¹ It also called on the UN Secretary-General, the U.S., U.K., and Russia to convene a conference on the establishment of a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (MEWMDFFZ) with the attendance of all states in the region. This conference was slated for December 2012, but was postponed indefinitely in November due to regional instability.

Although the MENWFZ has been on the table for four decades, little substantive progress has been made. Regional insecurity coupled with Israel’s nuclear arsenal and Iran’s enrichment activities presents a significant challenge. In the past, Israel has been reluctant to engage in MENWFZ negotiations until a peace process is established. Egypt maintains the position that peace cannot be discussed without Israel’s nuclear arsenal on the table first – nuclear weapons must be part of the process from the beginning.

Briefly, What is Today’s Nuclear Situation?

Israel

Israel is the only state in the Middle East that possesses nuclear weapons. Although Israel practices a policy of “nuclear opacity,” it possesses an estimated 80 nuclear

¹ 2010 NPT Review Conference Final Document
<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/legal/npt/revcon2010/DraftFinalDocument.pdf>

weapons. Israel has stated in the past that it will not be the first state to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East.

Iran

Iran is party to the NPT, however there is strong suspicion among the international community that its uranium enrichment program has a military dimension. In 2003, Iran temporarily suspended its uranium enrichment activities in response to international concerns, but resumed its program in 2005. Secret documents dismissed as forgeries by Iranian officials indicated that Iran sought to modify its missiles to carry a nuclear warhead. The IAEA found Iran in noncompliance with its safeguards agreements because of undisclosed enrichment facilities. The U.S. intelligence community believes Iran halted its weapon program in 2003, but concerns remain over Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium. The UN Security Council has passed several resolutions requiring Iran to suspend its enrichment activities. Iran recently agreed to temporarily suspend some parts of its nuclear work in exchange for lifting sanctions.

Arab States

No other state in the Middle East possesses nuclear weapons, although several have or are pursuing civilian nuclear capabilities (Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Yemen, Syria). One concern of the international community, however, is the potential for a regional arms race if Iran becomes a de facto nuclear weapons state. Saudi Arabia has publicly stated it will consider acquiring its own nuclear weapons if it feels threatened.