

Parliamentary call to action:

Support diplomacy, not force, to prevent nuclear proliferation in the Middle East!

Suggested parliamentary actions:

- **Endorse** the Joint Parliamentary Statement for a Middle East Zone Free from Nuclear Weapons and all other Weapons of Mass Destruction¹ (also available in - Arabic, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Japanese and Spanish);
- **Ask** parliamentary questions, or **submit** motions, on supporting a diplomatic approach to preventing nuclear proliferation in the Middle East;
- **Support** the UN-sponsored process including the 2012 Conference on Establishing a Middle East Zone Free from Nuclear Weapons and all other Weapons of Mass Destruction

Background



Growing concern about Iran's uranium enrichment and the possibility of Iran moving toward a nuclear weapons capability has prompted the United Nations, European Union and various national governments to impose increasingly comprehensive sanctions against Iran, and is prompting speculation – particularly in Israel and the United States, about the possible use of pre-emptive force against Iran's uranium enrichment facilities.

Any move by Iran to acquire nuclear weapons would most likely trigger further proliferation in the region and set back the already troubled Middle East peace process.² Iran remains party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), claims it has no

intention to develop nuclear weapons, and the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has issued a fatwa denouncing nuclear arms as anti-Islamic.³

However, recent revelations about Iran's research into nuclear triggers, coupled with Iran's lack of complete transparency to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding all aspects of its nuclear energy program, fuel speculation that Iran is keeping its options open.⁴

The call for strengthened sanctions against Iran is thus understandable. However, a number of analysts argue that sanctions and the threat of force are counter-productive, unless they are part of a non-discriminatory approach to nuclear non-proliferation applicable to all actual and potential nuclear weapons proliferators in the region, coupled with progress on implementation of NPT obligations for global nuclear disarmament.

¹ "Joint Parliamentary Statement for a Middle East Zone Free from Nuclear Weapons and all other Weapons of Mass Destruction" http://www.gsinsitute.org/pnnd/docs/MEWMDZ_2011.pdf

² "Saudi Royal warns that Mideast could face nuclear arms race" *Associated Press*, January 26, 2012, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-prince-warns-of-middle-east-nuclear-arms-race-442448.html>

³ "Iran issues anti-nuke fatwa" *World War 4 Report*, December 8, 2005, <http://www.ww4report.com/node/929>

⁴ "Iran's Nuclear Programme" *New York Times*, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iran/nuclear_program/index.html?offset=0&s=n
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Focusing on Iran's potential nuclear capabilities while ignoring the nuclear weapons programs of Iran's neighbours, and the ongoing threats from other nuclear armed States, appears to be strengthening the internal support for the Iranian regime's intransigence – pushing the country towards nuclear deterrence as a security option.⁵

The use of force to 'surgically destroy' Iran's uranium enrichment facilities would be unlikely to block a determined Iran from advancing its program, could lead to regional war, and could further prompt a move toward a nuclear deterrence option, not only in Iran but also in other Middle East countries.⁶



A more promising alternative to preventing proliferation in the Middle East is for governments to rally behind the United Nations sponsored process for establishing a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction.⁷ A recent public opinion poll in Israel indicated that a majority favoured this diplomatic approach over the threat or use of force against Iran.⁸

Following up on a unanimous resolution in the UN General Assembly⁹, and a consensus decision at the 2012 Conference of States Parties to the NPT, the United Nations (in conjunction with the US, UK and

Russia - and in consultation with countries in the Middle East) has appointed a host country and a facilitator to commence the diplomatic process for achieving such a zone, starting with a high-level conference of all countries from the region in Finland later this year.¹⁰

A regional zone free from WMD would not only strengthen non-proliferation commitments and mechanisms applicable to all countries in the region, it would also come with security assurances by the Nuclear Weapon States that they would not threaten a nuclear attack on any countries within the zone – an important security requirement that would stem proliferation by removing a key stimulus to countries to adopt nuclear deterrence doctrines.

Establishing such a zone would be incredibly difficult and take some time, probably through a phased process that includes confidence-building measures, such as ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty by all States in the region, and diplomatic recognition by all States in the region. Such security-enhancing measures would not only advance the WMD free zone process, but could feed into the Israel-Palestine peace process and strengthen the entire regional peace and security framework at large. What is important is political will and the commencement of negotiations. Parliamentarians have a vital role building this political will and supporting good faith negotiations.¹¹

Parliamentarians were active--indeed at times vital-- in the establishment of Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones in other regions including Antarctica, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Pacific, Africa, South East Asia and Central Asia. Most of these zones were difficult to achieve, including countries or territories that were involved in nuclear testing, deployment or extended nuclear deterrence doctrines. The experience in overcoming these difficulties to develop security without nuclear weapons can encourage success in the Middle East.

Please report any actions you take to alyn@pnnd.org

⁵ "Preventing a Nuclear Iran, Peacefully" *New York Times*, January 15, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/16/opinion/preventing-a-nuclear-iran-peacefully.html?_r=1&ref=nuclearprogram

⁶ "Former Mossad Chief: Israeli attack on Iran must be stopped to avert catastrophe" *Haaretz Daily Newspaper*, January 12, 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/former-mossad-chief-israeli-attack-on-iran-must-be-stopped-to-avert-catastrophe-1.399046>

⁷ Ibid footnote 5.

⁸ "Israeli Public Supports Middle East Nuclear Free Zone" *World Public Opinion*, December 1, 2011, <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnafricara/695.php?nid=&id=&pnt=695&lb=brme>

⁹ United Nations General Assembly First Committee, 65th session, Agenda Item 93, A/C.1/65/L.5, 5 October, 2010 <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com10/res/L1.pdf>

¹⁰ "Finland to Host Conference for WMD-Free Middle East" *Inter Press Service*, 19 October, 2011, <http://ipsnews.net/2011/10/finland-to-host-conference-for-wmd-free-middle-east/>

¹¹ "Parliamentarians Vital in Supporting a Nuclear Weapons-free Middle East" *PNND*, 20 October, 2011, http://www.gsinsitute.org/pnnd/archives/ME_10_19_11.html