

WMD-Free Middle East Proposal at a Glance

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Press Contact: [Kelsey Davenport](#), Nonproliferation Analyst, Phone” +1 202-463-8270 x102

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As part of a package of decisions that resulted in the indefinite extension of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), the 1995 NPT 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.” First put forth by Egypt in 1990, the Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone (WMDFZ) proposal expanded on longstanding calls to establish a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East. Both measures, intended to be pursued in parallel, have garnered broad international support but practical progress has since been elusive.

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) first endorsed calls for the establishment of a NWFZ in a resolution approved in December of 1974 following a proposal by Iran and Egypt. Since 1980, that resolution has been passed annually without a vote by UNGA and endorsement for the proposals has been incorporated in a number of UN Security Council Resolutions. From 1991 onwards the IAEA General Conference has also adopted annually without objections a resolution calling for the application of full scope safeguards on all nuclear facilities in the region “as a necessary step for the establishment of the NWFZ.”^[1]

Prompted by Egypt in 1988, the UN Secretary General undertook a “Study on Effective and Verifiable Measures which Would Facilitate the Establishment of a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East”^[2] that looked at conditions surrounding the creation of NWFZ and made a number recommendations including a list confidence building measures. A 1989 IAEA Technical Study also looked at various modalities for the application of safeguards on nuclear facilities in the Middle East as a necessary step to establishing a NWFZ.^[3]

Despite extensive international support and the catalogue of resolutions endorsed including by all regional states, practical progress has been stymied by sharp disagreements between countries in the region over the terms and the sequence of steps leading to the establishment of the zone. Reflecting differing perceptions of threat and security concerns existing in the region, Israel has closely linked discussions on the establishment of the WMDFZ with the existence of durable peace and compliance with international obligations by states in the region.^[4] Arab states have said that no such linkage should exist and that the establishment of WMDFZ would contribute to peaceful relations.

Basic Elements of the Middle East WMDFZ

A future WMDFZ would commit parties not to possess, acquire, test, manufacture or use any *nuclear, chemical and biological weapons as well as their delivery systems* as provided for in the 1995 NPT Review Conference Middle East resolution.[\[5\]](#) Definitions for what constitutes these types of non-conventional weapons are contained in international treaties on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons,[\[6\]](#) as well as the 1948 United Nations Commission for Conventional Armaments.[\[7\]](#) A shared understanding would also be required to regulate the types of delivery systems that would become subject to the prohibitions under the zone. Discussions to date include proposals for banning all ballistic missiles with ranges in excess of 150 km.[\[8\]](#)

Territory: The 1989 IAEA Technical Study,[\[9\]](#) which first took up the geographic delimitation of a future Middle East NWFZ, applied the concept to a region extending from Libya in the west, to Iran in the east, and from Syria in the north to Yemen in the south. A subsequent UN Study[\[10\]](#) expanded the concept further by including all League of Arab states, plus Iran and Israel in the zone. The Arab League has officially endorsed the UN Study delimitation and Israel has raised no objection other than note that any country in the region should be publicly recognized and accepted as an integral part thereof. Suggestions of including Afghanistan, Pakistan as well as Turkey in the eventual zone have not gained any significant traction.

Verification: One of the principles recognized by the UNGA Resolution on NWFZs in 1975[\[11\]](#) was that such a zone “should provide for effective verification of compliance with the commitments made by the parties to the Treaty.” Israel has long insisted that any future WMDFZ must also provide “for mutual verification measures” while other proposals have included calls for setting up a regional organization to ensure compliance.

Schedule Ahead

At the 2010 NPT Review Conference, state parties were able to agree for the first time to five practical steps to make progress towards implementing the 1995 NPT Review Conference Middle East resolution. The United States, Russia and the United Kingdom, the treaty depository powers and sponsors of that Resolution, committed to work together with the UN Secretary General to convene a regional conference to discuss the issue in 2012. Other measures agreed included the appointment of a WMDFZ facilitator as well as designation of a government that will host the conference.[\[12\]](#) State parties will take up the question of the implementation of these steps at the subsequent NPT Review Conference in 2015.

The European Union has also offered to host a seminar, a follow-up on the one organized in Paris in 2008, to discuss steps that would facilitate work on establishing the Free Zone ahead of 2012 Conference.[\[13\]](#)

In November 2011, a two-day meeting was held at the IAEA headquarters. Proposals by 97 participating nations included:

- to continue working towards the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East;
- to consider declarations of good intentions as a first step to break the current stalemate;

- to make the best and most constructive use of every opportunity on the international agenda; and
- to identify specific and practical confidence-building measures.[\[14\]](#)

The regional conference on the establishment of a WMD free zone in the Middle East proposed by the NPT was set to be held in Finland in December 2012, and Finnish Undersecretary of State Jaakko Laajava was named as the facilitator.

2012 Meeting Postponed

On November 23, the United States issued a statement postponing the December 2012 conference. The conference has not yet been rescheduled, and the co-conveners are offering different options as to when it should be held, and the reasons for the delay. The U.S. statement cited "present conditions in the Middle East" and the lack of agreement by participating states on "acceptable conditions" for the December conference. No timeline for rescheduling was included. In a November 24 statement, Russia called for the conference to be held before April 2013, citing that the preparations had already reached an "advanced stage" and that the reason for postponement was that not all states in the region agreed to participate in the conference. At the time of the announcement, conference facilitator Jaakko Laajava, had not yet secured Israel's attendance. While Iran announced that it would attend on November 7, it also said it would not engage with the Israelis at the conference, and some experts believe Iran only announced it would attend because Tehran knew that the December 2012 meeting would not take place.

Chronology of Important Dates.

1974 – The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) approves resolution endorsing the goal of establishing a NWFZ in the Middle East following a proposal by Iran.

1980 - Israel joins international consensus allowing the General Assembly to pass a resolution supporting the goal of NWFZ without a vote.

1989 - The IAEA Secretariat issues report titled “A Technical Study on Different Modalities of Application of Safeguards in the Middle East.”

1990 - The Egyptian proposal to establish an expanded WMD free zone in the Middle East is first submitted before the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

1991 – The UN Secretary General releases a “Study on Effective and Verifiable Measures which Would Facilitate the Establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East” outlining, amongst other things, a number of confidence building steps that could contribute to the establishment of the zone.

1991 – The IAEA General Conference passes resolution on “the Application of IAEA safeguards in the Middle” as a necessary step towards the establishment of a NWFZ in the region. The resolution has since been passed annually without objections.

1991 – The UN Security Council Resolution 687 endorses goal of establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East.

1992 – Discussions on regional arms control begin under the aegis of the Arms Control and Regional Security Group (ACRS), a multilateral regional body born out of the Madrid Middle East peace talks. Envisaged to include discussions on a future WMDFZ, talks were placed indefinitely on hold following disagreement between Israel and Egypt over the agenda for discussing WMDFZ related issues. Iran and Iraq were not party to these talks.

1995 - The NPT Review Conference adopts a Resolution on the Middle East calling on states to take practical steps to make progress in the establishment of WMDFZ in the region. Member agreement on resolution was seen as key to securing the indefinite extension of the NPT.

2000 - The NPT Review conference reaffirms the goal of 1995 Middle East Resolution and says that the resolution remains “valid until its goals and objectives are achieved.”

2006 – The WMD Commission Final Report calls for an intensification of international efforts to establish a WMDFZ in the Middle East.

2010 - The NPT Review Conference endorses five practical steps to make progress towards the goal of establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East. Action steps adopted include convening a regional conference to discuss the issue in 2012 and appointing a WMDFZ Facilitator.

2011 - Two-day meeting held at IAEA headquarters on a WMDFZ in the Middle East.

Updated by Wanda Archy.

1. Technical Study on Different Modalities of the Application of Safeguards in the Middle East, available from http://www.iaea.org/About/Policy/GC/GC33/GC33Documents/English/gc33-887_en.pdf. Accessed February 2, 2011.
2. UN Study on Effective and Verifiable Measures Which Would Facilitate the Establishment of Nuclear-weapon-free Zone in the Middle East. 1991. Available from <http://www.un.org/disarmament/HomePage/ODAPublications/DisarmamentStudySeries/PDF/SS-22.pdf>. Accessed February 7, 2011.
3. Technical Study on Different Modalities of the Application of Safeguards in the Middle East.
4. In the context of ACRS talks, Israel reportedly agreed to begin discussions “a nuclear-weapon-free-zone two years after peace agreements had been signed with all of its neighbors...”
5. The 1995 NPT Conference Resolution on the Middle East, text available from http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/1995-NPT/pdf/Resolution_MiddleEast.pdf.
6. With the exception of Israel, all countries in the region are parties to the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.
7. Weapons of mass destruction were defined by the United Nations Commission for Conventional Armaments, on 13 August 1948, as “atomic explosive weapons, radioactive material weapons, lethal chemical and biological weapons, and any weapons developed in the future which have characteristics comparable in destructive effect to those of the atomic bomb or other weapons mentioned above.”

8. The UNSC Resolution 687, 1991 that required the elimination of Iraq's WMD including all ballistic missile with a range exceeding 150 km considered these measures "steps towards the goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for their delivery."
9. Technical Study on Different Modalities of the Application of Safeguards in the Middle East, Available from http://www.iaea.org/About/Policy/GC/GC33/GC33Documents/English/gc33-887_en.pdf. Accessed September 28, 2010.
10. UN Study on Effective and Verifiable Measures.
11. General Assembly resolution [3472 B \(1975\)](#) defines a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone as "any zone recognized as such by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which any group of States, in the free exercises of their sovereignty, has established by virtue of a treaty or convention whereby:
 - (a) The statute of total absence of nuclear weapons to which the zone shall be subject, including the procedure for the delimitation of the zone, is defined;
 - (b) An international system of verification and control is established to guarantee compliance with the obligations deriving from that statute."
12. For a review of the document adopted by the 2010 NPT Conference please refer to ACT June 2010 issue article on the subject available at the ACA's website.
13. Catherine Ashton, the EU Foreign Policy Chief, reiterated European readiness to host the seminar in a letter to the IAEA Director General in July of 2010. Text of the letter available from http://www.iaea.org/About/Policy/GC/GC54/GC54Documents/English/gc54-14_en.pdf ; page 75.
14. IAEA, "Forum on Nuclear-Weapons-Free-Zone in the Middle East Closes." Available from <http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/2011/nwzf-forum-closes.html>.