

Chronology of a NWFZ in the Middle East

1974: launching of the idea at the UNGA (Iran and Egypt)

The idea of a Middle East nuclear weapons free zone has been floating for over thirty years, yet proposals to establish such a zone have not progressed beyond it being a mere concept. Iran, in 1974, one year prior to the 30th UN General Assembly adoption of resolution 3472 outlining the guidelines and principles for creating NWFZs, proposed such a zone to the Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee) of the UN General Assembly and was supported by Egypt days later. Since then, thirty-four resolutions supporting its creation have been adopted by the UN General Assembly, often by consensus. In addition to that, the said assembly has since 1995 also been annually adopting resolutions addressing the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and citing Israel as the only State in the Middle East that has not yet become party to the Treaty.

1980: Israel joined the consensus on the GA resolution, but conditioned any discussion of it to be in direct negotiations.

1990: the call for NWFZ was renewed, to include other WMDs.

The call for such a zone was renewed in 1990 when Egypt launched with the support of all Arab States, its initiative for establishing a Middle East nuclear weapons and other WMDs free zone.

1991: UNSC Res. 687 (Para. 14).

In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, Security Council ceasefire resolution 687 stipulated that the elimination of Iraq's WMD programs represents steps "towards the goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free from WMD".

1991-1994: The Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group was established until it reached a deadlock.

In October 1991, the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) launched the Madrid Peace Conference to promote and advance regional cooperation. The Conference's framework established five multilateral working groups, one of which focused on regional security and arms control, known as Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Working Group that met in the period 1991 to 1995 until it reached a deadlock due to Israel's refusal, among other things, to place the nuclear issue on the agenda.

1995: NPT Rev. & Ext. Conf. adopted the "ME Resolution", and the Arab League established an expert committee to elaborate a draft treaty to transform the M.E. into a Zone free of WMD.

At the 1995 Review Conference of the NPT, the renowned "Middle East Resolution" 60/52 was adopted as part of a package deal for Arab States to agree to the decision for the indefinite extension of the NPT- the latter taken on May 11, 1995 by 175 out of 178 countries without a vote. The said resolution called on the remaining countries in the area that were not parties to the NPT to accede to it as soon as possible, and urged non-parties to accept full scope IAEA safeguards. It also called on all states in the Middle East and all parties to the NPT to make every effort to establish a Middle East free of all nuclear and mass destruction weapons.

In connection with the indefinite extension of the NPT, the five Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) agreed to a joint statement at the 2000 NPT Review Conference that commits them to "systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate aim of eliminating these weapons".

2000: All Arab States became party to the NPT.

By 2000, all the Arab states were parties to the NPT, and the importance of the "Middle East Resolution" was reaffirmed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference. The resolution was acknowledged as remaining valid until its goals have been fulfilled. The Conference called upon Israel, the only state in the region that has not joined the treaty yet, to join as soon as possible.

2003: Draft UNSG resolution:

A draft resolution calling for a zone free of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, was presented to UNSC by Arab states, and rejected by the US under the pretext: "not the right time".

2005: Another Review Conference Failure:

The 2005 Review Conference ended in failure. No agreement was reached on specific outcomes, the cessation or reduction of nuclear disarmament efforts and the inability of the international community at the 2005 Summit held during the 60th session of the General Assembly to adopt any direction in the field of disarmament. This failure, to a large extent, was due to US insistence on not referring to the commitments contained in the Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference.

2009: The IAEA General Conference adopted a resolution entitled "Israeli Nuclear Capabilities" in spite of "western group" resistance.

2010: NPT Review Conference adopts a final document, including an action plan for the implementation of the 1995 Middle East Resolution.

2011: designating Finland as a host country and a Finish Facilitator to the 2012 Conference.

2012: Conveners declare postponement of Conference without fixing a new date.

2013: No progress and efforts reached a dead-end.

2015: Review Conference failed to adopt a final document as the USA, Brittan, and Canada declared that they cannot agree to language proposed for the ME.

(I intend to present soon a backgrounder and a food for thought paper that will be dedicated to the events and developments of the period 2010-2015)