

**A Middle East
"Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone"**

Public Conference

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Public Address at SOAS

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League of Arab States

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to start by quoting the final report of the WMDC issued in 2006: (quote) "So long as any state has such weapons – especially nuclear arms – others will want them." (Unquote) It would be wise to keep this in mind as we speak of non-proliferation in the ME.

The ME is one of the most turbulent regions of the world. At this moment we have four major conflicts: Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, and, off course, the Arab-Israeli conflict. Lebanon, which had survived the Israeli war last year, and has just come back from the brink of political chaos, is not completely out of the woods. The Iranian file remains very controversial and might easily lead to military confrontation.

In addition to these conflicts, which have spill-over effects into neighboring states, the ME also suffers a number of problems; such as border issues, water shortages, terrorism and energy security, and is confronted with massive social and economic problems and inequalities. There are six states in the region classified among the Least Developed Countries (LCDs).

One fact is clearly evident when we look at this very volatile overview of the ME: the last thing this region needs is the presence of nuclear weapons. That is a devastating recipe for instability and insecurity.

In the 60s of the 20th Century, as information on Israel's nuclear program became public, the Arab states faced three alternatives to dealing with the "Israeli Nuclear problem". The first option was to accept and coexist with nuclear weapons in the region. Needless to say, coexistence with nuclear weapons in the hands of others was never a viable option for the region or any other region or any other region for that matter. As a result the Arab states moved at the international fora to warn against the dangers of the Israeli nuclear policies and its ramifications on regional security and peace.

Therefore, the second option, which was to develop NWs to counter balance the Israeli nuclear threat, became viable in the sixties. Nasser, the President of Egypt at the time, declared, when the Dimona reactor became known, that if Israel can manufacture Nuclear weapons so will Egypt. This is basically the same position of other states, like the Soviet Union, Argentina and Pakistan, when they were confronted with the nuclear capabilities of other adversaries the USA, Brazil and India.

The third option was "Regional Elimination of NWs", and it became the stronger and more dominant thrust of Arab policies since the 70s. This option took concrete shape in the 1974 UNGA Resolution on the creation of a NWFZ in the ME. The Arab states adopted the idea and developed it into an initiative that they have been marketing at the international level for the last three decades.

The creation of a NWFZ is a topic close to the hearts of the Arabs, for in spite of the rhetorical support given to the idea by almost every state, we feel that we have become the only advocates and keepers of this idea at the international arena. Yet it is also a source of great frustration as we realize that 34 years have elapsed since the initiative was launched without taking one step forward towards realizing it.

I will not bore you with the history of the idea since its inception, but would like to remind you of specific milestones along the way:

- The 1980s: Israel joined the consensus on the GA resolution, but insisted that any discussion of it must be indirect negotiations. That position shifted when direct negotiations were possible, and kept changing to avoid any discussion of the issue.
- 1991: The UNSC Res. 687 on Iraq was adopted. The resolution was fully implemented except paragraph 14 that considered the measures taken in that resolution a step towards creating a WMDFZ in the ME.
- 1991-1995: The Arms Control and Regional Security working group (ACRS) was established within the multilateral track of the peace process until it reached a deadlock. One of the main reasons for its failure was Israel's refusal to put the nuclear file on the agenda.
- 1994: The Arab League established a governmental expert committee to elaborate a draft treaty to transform the ME into a Zone free of NW and WMD.
- 1995: The NPT Rev. and Ext. Conf. adopted the "ME Resolution". It was sponsored by the three depository States, and adopted by consensus. It was part and parcel of the package deal of extending the NPT indefinitely.
- By 2000: All Arab States became party to the NPT, and the 2000 Rev. Conf. called upon Israel, the only state in the region that has not joined the treaty yet, to join ASAP.
- 2007: After 33 years and over a hundred resolutions from different for a, the NWFZ was still in the pre-negotiation phase. A report to the Arab League Summit in Riyadh reported on the regional nuclear dilemma.

The Summit in Riyadh expressed concern and disappointment, suspended the work of the Expert Committee on drafting a WMDFZ, and called the Arab League to conduct an evaluation of Arab Policies in this area, and requested recommendations on possible alternatives if the situation persists.

The frustration that the Arabs feel as a result of this total lack of momentum stems from the fact that the initiative would provide a way out of the current situation of nuclear proliferation and if combined with the Arab League Peace Initiative, both would provide security for every body in the region, yet neither initiatives have been take seriously. The Arab League has called for a "regional approach" to the proliferation of WMDs, instead of the "state-by-state" approach that is being used now, which is evidently selective and biased.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Israel is the only nuclear capable state in the region. It has been ranked fourth in terms of deployed nuclear weapons after the US, Russia and France. Israeli conventional and unconventional arms superiority in the Middle East will trigger a new phase in the regional arms race, if it persists. The logical way out of this dilemma is to gradually lay the ground for the NWFZ. This will necessitate a revision of the entrenched positions of the parties involved, using fresh thinking. To create momentum, we need to examine every possible avenue.

Today, all the Arab states are party to the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), sixteen are party to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and fourteen are party to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). Iran is a party to the three conventions. Israel, in stark comparison, is basically non party to any of these conventions. To date, Israel which refuses to join the NPT is unwilling to ratify the CWC and has declined to join the BTWC.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The non-proliferation regime has been in a serious crisis for the last few years. Part of the problem stems from the deviation and distortion in international discourse on non-proliferation, and from the attempts of international discourse on non-proliferation, and attempts of certain groups and powers to reinterpret the NPT to serve their interests. Allow me to briefly comment on some of the ideas and that have become part of the disarmament discourse regarding the ME.

The first is the idea that the nuclear free zone cannot be pursued in isolation from the achievement of a peace settlement in the region? Some are using this to say that Israel has the right to defend itself, and in order for it to maintain its security, Israel cannot give up its nuclear weapons, join the NPT, or even negotiate a NWFZ except after settling the Arab Israeli conflict and achieving permanent peace!

This logic endorses the idea that NWs provide security to Israel. I put it to you that this is a very dangerous proposition, for if NWs provide security to one, it should provide security to the rest. To me that amounts to an invitation to proliferation.

I would also like to remind everybody that all the Arab States joined the NPT during the ongoing conflict with Israel, and did not use the conflict as a pretext to refrain from joining the NPT or developing NWs. NWs do not provide security to Israeli in this conflict, and the creation of the zone will work as a tremendous CSBM and assist in reaching peace.

The second issue is the response we hear when we question the double standards used in dealing with the Israeli nuclear program.

Some would immediately point out that Israel is not party to the NPT, hence has no obligations, while others who are members have. I hope we will not hear such arguments in this prestigious assembly. For what does this argument really mean? Is Israel, because it refused to sign the NPT, free to develop NWs? While, others are not because they chose to be party to it and, therefore, would be punished by military action? Are we punishing those who joined and rewarding those who refused? I pose the question to those who feel comfortable with the legal argument, are you advocating to others to withdraw from the treaty and then will be free to pursue nuclear weapons? That argument is dangerous and counterproductive.

The third and last issue I would like to speak of is the distortion in the multilateral discourse over non-proliferation. The deviation in this discourse has taken it away from the original principles under which states agreed to join the NPT. The present discourse focuses on preventing nuclear weapons from

falling in the hands of most dangerous actors, be it "rogue states", "irresponsible" governments, or non-state actors. This logic claims that it is not the weapons that we should worry about, but who owns them. This is a discriminatory approach that goes against the principles of non-proliferation as stated in the NPT. In addition, there are no objective criterion for what constitutes a responsible state and who is authorized to make such a classification. The original proposition was that it is not acceptable for any state, regardless of its qualifications, to obtain nuclear weapons. There are no "Good Proliferators" and "Bad Proliferators". All proliferators should not be tolerated.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What the ME needs now is an international effort to adopt practical measures to lead the region towards serious negotiations on establishing the NWFZ as a step to wards establishing the WMDFZ in the ME. The three depository states of NPT, the US, UK, and Russia have a special responsibility towards implementing the 1995 NPT Rev. Con. Resolutions on the ME, because they introduced that Resolution.

Lastly all the states in the region have to start, under international supervision, serious negotiations on arms control, giving priority to nuclear disarmament. Maybe, we need a more *mature* form of the ACRS.

We should collectively seek these goals, not as adversaries, but as partners in the region. If Israel wants to be part of the ME it has to abide by the same rules. We should steer away from the zero-sum-games that have been preventing the region from creating any cooperative security arrangement, and finally, we should start now.

I thank you for your patience.