

**Security, Power, and Regional Stability: Nuclear Weapons-  
Free Zones and the Middle East**

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## Security, Power, and Regional Stability: Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones and the Middle East

*Nuclear weapons, as the most destructive weapons capability known to man, have become a focal point of international security since their inception. Nuclear-Weapons Free Zones, or NWFZs, seem to have risen to prominence in the arms control field, so a NWFZ in the Middle East has attracted the attention of both the regional players and the international community. This study investigates the prospects of a NWFZ in the Middle East by looking into the security climate of the region and how a NWFZ might be integrated into the existing framework. This report looks at the other existing NWFZs and compares those to the Middle East as well as analyzes the how a NWFZ might be received by the relevant parties. While it might be desirable for the nuclear nonproliferation community, the findings indicate that the politics of disarmament are likely an obstacle to making any real progress on NWFZ negotiations anytime soon.*

Nuclear weapons are the most dangerous and strategically complex modern military capability. International, regional, and multilateral negotiations, as well as strict punishments have all been implemented to various degrees as an attempt by states to curtail the spread of these deadly weapons. Though there are currently 9 nuclear weapons possessing states and more than 22,000<sup>1</sup> total nuclear weapons worldwide, the efforts made to minimize the spread of nuclear weapons and technology have made strides in securing nuclear materials and promoting an international norm of nonproliferation. The implementation of international treaties, such as the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, have created an environment in which further negotiations and arms control efforts can be conducted and progress toward total disarmament can continue to be made.

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<sup>1</sup> Federation of American Scientists, Status of World Nuclear Forces 2011.  
<http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/nuclearweapons/nukestatus.html>.

Nuclear Weapons Free Zones (NWFZ) have been implemented on regional levels in order to promote geographical regions in which the relevant parties have agreed to keep free of nuclear weapons. These regional treaties, enacted in several regions of the world, provide smaller avenues for negotiation among those states within a given region, as well as further advocate and reiterate more global nonproliferation goals. Politically, the NWFZ can be seen as an effective vehicle for progression of nonproliferation agendas and a mechanism for public debate about denuclearization. The idea of a NWFZ in the Middle East has gained prominence over the years since this region is particularly problematic for the international nonproliferation regime. Proliferation in the Middle East is of utmost concern for the international community, and the idea of negotiating a MENWFZ (Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone) has risen in popularity accordingly.

A challenge to the MENWFZ negotiations continues to the security climate of the region. The states in the Middle East have faced many significant security dilemmas, wars, brutally oppressive dictatorships, foreign interventions, and monumental revolutions. This region has proven itself to be both vitally important strategically but also extremely volatile and prone to conditions precipitating nuclear proliferation. Furthermore, the state of Israel already possesses nuclear weapons, presenting an even more severe obstacle to denuclearizing the region. The MENWFZ, if it can be successfully negotiated and implemented, should serve to reduce the dangerous risks of a Middle East arms race or, more frighteningly, regional nuclear war.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the relevant factors that could promote or hinder the progress of such a strategically critical treaty. Without clear direction or even an agreed upon starting point, this paper looks at the very rudimentary challenges to the negotiation of a MENWFZ from the very basic premises and concerns of the relevant parties. Attempting to understand the plausibility of the treaty will lend itself to further research into the preconditions for negotiations, specific issues that must be addressed, and the protocols to implementing the treaty. However, this is all extending beyond today's realistic security climate as well as the scope of this research.

The MENWFZ is not going to be an easy task for the Middle Eastern nations, the existing nuclear powers, or the international nonproliferation regime, but the idea is not completely naïve or idealistic. Though it will not happen soon, nor will it be an easy process, this regional treaty has the potential to be seriously considered, if not negotiated and signed, sometime in the future. Looking forward, given the perils facing a world in which a Middle East arms race runs rampant and the region is on the constant verge of a nuclear holocaust, it seems as though it would be worth the time, energy, and effort for the regional powers and international community to work diligently to facilitate dialogue concerning a MENWFZ and ratifying and enacting the proper protocols to make such a treaty an effective nonproliferation mechanism in one of the world's most volatile regions.

#### Research Question

Since there has clearly been an international push for denuclearization, regional treaties such as Nuclear Weapons Free Zones have become a popular and

effective way for states in a geographical boundary to decide to move toward regional nonproliferation and reduce the role of nuclear weapons within the boundary. With the global security climate constantly shifting, the idea of a NWFZ in the Middle East has garnered some substantial international attention.<sup>2</sup> With the unique security climate in the already volatile region, this paper will seek to analyze the various political and security concerns within the region and among the international community and other critical parties, such as the United States, to determine the plausibility of enacting such a regional treaty. What are the conditions under which the Middle Eastern states would agree to move towards a NWFZ? What are the state-specific challenges facing the establishment of a MENWFZ? If progress is to be made on denuclearizing the Middle East, what obstacles will need to be overcome? These are all large-scale questions that cannot be answered in any simple terms, but provide the goals of the research presented here.

A state-level analysis of the internal and external threats facing the MENWFZ as well as the nuclear postures of the states in the region will provide a clearer picture of whether or not implementation of a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone is a realistic goal for the international nonproliferation regime or just a rhetorical push for the advancement of nonproliferation goals. Each state in the region has unique security concerns that must be addressed before any such multilateral agreements can be made, so understanding more broadly what the interests are on a state by state basis will help to unveil the larger challenges that must be addressed

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<sup>2</sup> See United Nations A/RES/38/64; also NPT/CONF.1995/32 (Part I).

regionally by the NWFZ Treaty. A qualitative study of the states' critical security interests is essential to understand how to implement a regional disarmament agreement, and this paper will seek to start preliminary research into the states' nuclear positions and how each state might best be added into the NWFZ.

Furthermore, this paper will look deeper into the international support given to the development of a denuclearized Middle East, both because of the general international push toward disarmament as well as the especially pressing security concerns presented by the Middle East. Recently, Iran has presented a crucial challenge to international arms control, and a MENWFZ could serve to curtail the direct threat posed to the international nonproliferation regime by a nuclear Iran. Also especially problematic is the already nuclear-armed Israel, which has been generally unwilling to address the nonproliferation regime and submit its arsenal to international safeguards or follow established international nuclear norms. Without going beyond the scope of this paper, the research that follows will attempt to understand why there has been such broad-based international support for a MENWFZ, and whether or not international pressures have the potential to amount to any substantive arms control negotiations in the region.

Examining the prospects of a Nuclear Weapons Free-Zone in the Middle East is a weighty task given the unique and volatile security climate in the region. As with many areas in international politics, the regional nature of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones requires a standardized and understood definition of the region falling under the treaty's jurisdiction. There has been a considerable amount of academic debate as to what, exactly, makes up the region known as the Middle East, and over

time, the accepted group of states included in this region has evolved. Oftentimes the region includes North African countries, including Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, and Algeria, as well as some Central Asian countries, such as Afghanistan or Pakistan.

There have been several ideas about how to define the “Middle East” as far as the territorial jurisdiction for the NWFZ. Initial proposals included the immediate region from Libya to Iran and Syria to Yemen. However, there have been other proposals that have extended the considered territory, including the entirety of the Arab League and Iran and Israel<sup>3</sup>. Since there is no official consensus on which countries will be included in the treaty, it seems as though a realistic starting point is the original proposal of the immediate region, and perhaps extending the parameters of the Treaty to include the rest of the Arab League as the Treaty takes shape. It is also particularly challenging to consider Libya in terms of this Treaty at the present due to the internal conflicts taking place between the Qaddafi government and the rebels. With the power structure of the state currently unknown, considering the state’s support for an international treaty becomes increasingly difficult. Thus the Middle East, for the purposes of this paper, will consist of the following countries: Israel, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates.

This narrow definition will allow for a more thorough analysis of the security climate in just the geographic region in question, while also providing a comprehensive boundary for an enforceable NWFZ. This definition also tackles the major security concerns in the region, namely Israel and Iran, without sacrificing

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<sup>3</sup>Nurja, Alfred. “WMD-Free Middle East Proposal at a Glance,” Arms Control Association, <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/mewmdfz>.

plausibility for more broad inclusion. Future expansion of the definition of the region, which is not at all unlikely given the region's ever-changing political environment, will also lend itself to further research and a natural evolution of the geographical area that is to become nuclear weapons-free.

Furthermore, this paper will examine a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone using the definition and provisions given in the United Nations MENWFZ proposal. In order for the Nuclear Weapons Free Zone to be established, for the purposes of this paper, the states in the Middle East must

“declare solemnly that they will refrain, on a reciprocal basis, from producing, acquiring, or in any other way possessing nuclear weapons and nuclear explosive devices and from permitting the stationing of nuclear weapons on their territory by any third party, to agree to place all their nuclear facilities under International Atomic Agency safeguards, and to declare their support for the establishment of the zone and deposit such declarations with the Security Council for consideration...”<sup>4</sup>

This definition, provided in a United Nations MENWFZ proposal, will serve as the basic framework to which each state in the region must agree for the institution of a NWFZ. Furthermore, examining the incentives for signing a NWFZ includes provisions guaranteeing that nuclear states abide by certain restrictions with respect to the area in the NWFZ. In order for the Treaty to enter into force, the nuclear states must provide security assurances to the regional parties, agree to refrain from stationing or storing nuclear weapons in the region, and agree not to

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations. A/RES/38/64. *Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free-zone in the region of the Middle East*. General Assembly. New York. 15 December 1983.



use nuclear weapons against states in the region.<sup>5</sup> Since the introduction of NWFZs, however, there have been various degrees of regulations and protocols, but generally fit this outline. Because the treaties are all different, there is some opening for certain definitional discrepancies, within and outside of the international law community. Because the MENWFZ treaty has not been negotiated as of yet, the model used can be broad. First outlined for the Middle East NWFZ in 1983, these principles fit not only the basic definition of a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone, but also serve the underlying purposes for such a treaty. Hereafter, when this paper discusses the prospects of a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone treaty being enacted in the region of the Middle East, it is referring to a multilateral treaty signed by the aforementioned states, as well as ratified by the existing nuclear powers, in which the parties to the treaty agree to oblige by these provisions outlined by the United Nations. Since the entire world must agree to abide by the provisions in the treaty, it is critical that the treaty be thorough in its provisions and address the core interests of not only the region, but also the political climate of the international community since there will be ramifications outside of the Middle East as well.

## Literature Review

The literature regarding Nuclear Weapons Free Zones generally sees these treaties as an integral part of international nonproliferation efforts, and views the regional nature of the zones as an asset towards achieving more universal disarmament. Strategically, these treaties are seen as an additional nonproliferation

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<sup>5</sup> Pogany, Istvan. *Nuclear Weapons and International Law*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1987).

vehicle within the NPT agenda, which divides the world into nuclear powers and non-nuclear powers on the basis of 1968 with the ultimate goal of global disarmament, but is largely viewed as unsustainable as the world's foremost long-term effort to achieve denuclearization.<sup>6</sup> Essentially, the NPT does not go far enough in implementing strategies to move towards complete disarmament while a region-by-region NWFZ allows for states to move in the direction of fulfilling their NPT responsibilities. Distinguishing the key differences between the NPT and NWFZs is an important component of the literature since it explains how and why a NWFZ is largely regarded as an extension of the NPT, elaborating on the NPT goals by augmenting the size, scope, and strength of the core nonproliferation principles.

A NWFZ can be seen in a "Four Noes" context: no possession, no testing, no deployment, and no use of nuclear weapons within the geographical boundary outlined by the zone's treaty.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, NWFZ treaties are created without a clearly negotiated ending time, meaning that they are entered into force indefinitely. These treaties do not allow signatories to ratify with reservations, creating a rigid system of regulations preventing states within the region from having different nuclear standards.<sup>8</sup> They are NWFZs impose more legally binding regulations on party members, prohibiting the stationing of nuclear weapons within the region (while the NPT allows stationing as long as a non-nuclear weapons state does not

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<sup>6</sup> Thakur, Ramesh. "Stepping Stones to a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World." In *Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones*, ed. Ramesh Thakur. (Great Britain: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998), 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Magnarella, Paul J., "Attempts to Reduce and Eliminate Nuclear Weapons through the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Creation of Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones," *Peace & Change* 33 (2008): 511.

exercise autonomous jurisdiction over the weapons), as well as poses a binding commitment on the nuclear powers in which they forfeit their legal rights to use a nuclear weapons against a party to a NWFZ treaty.<sup>9</sup> The relationship between the NPT and NWFZs is, however, complicated. Many see NWFZ as a powerful and important supplement to the framework of the NPT and a method of creating tangible and legal arms control progress. While others see Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones as a means of distracting from and undermining the universality of the NPT and shifting essential disarmament practices to more localized levels rather than pursuing global denuclearization.<sup>10</sup>

Legally, NWFZs are regional in their jurisdiction, but place binding regulations on the entirety of the international system, where states agree not to store or station their own nuclear weapons in the region and provide certain assurances to states in the region. Since international law dictates that states are not permitted to unilaterally (or in this case multilaterally) implement binding regulations on territories outside of their established regional borders or on international waters or air space, the NWFZ must also include international bodies and other states who have the power to exert control over international territory as well as the states in the geographic boundary.<sup>11</sup> These types of stipulations regarding the jurisdiction of a NWFZ lead to broader concerns over the nuclear powers and their role in NWFZ protocol. There was much international debate as to

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Freestone, David and Scott Davidson. "Nuclear weapon-free zones." In *Nuclear Weapons and International Law*, ed. Istvan Pogany. (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1987). 179-180.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 182-183.

the role that the NPT nuclear weapons states would take. Objectively, NWFZs should not be impacted by nuclear powers outside of the regional jurisdiction, but the NWFZ is rendered ineffective if there are no security assurances provided by nuclear weapons-possessing states to those states that agree to abide by the NWFZ regulations.<sup>12</sup> Since negative security assurances are sometimes difficult to obtain from nuclear-capable states, a NWFZ can continue to be effective if there are positive security assurances provided to signatories, even though this is a less desirable security climate for those states involved in the treaty.<sup>13</sup>

The conditions for a NWFZ to be implemented and effective in reducing the risk of nuclearization within a specified area are generally thought to be related to the “security complex” of the region.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, a NWFZ is only truly effective if the external threats posed to a state are from other states within the jurisdiction of the Zone such that the NWFZ treaty eliminates the security concerns facing a country that would cause them to seek nuclear weapons.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the NWFZ should take into consideration the dynamics of the regional security climate, such that the larger and more powerful states in the jurisdiction will be less vulnerable in the event of a collapse of the agreement, and therefore more prone to “cheating”. These states will likely expect certain privileges bestowed upon them for signing such a treaty.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>13</sup> Ballany, Ian, *Curbing the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Pelgrave, 2005). 104.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 105.

Another critical component of the ideal Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone is the demonstrated ability to resolve regional security concerns through other multilateral or conventional ways. The literature gives examples of various characteristics of ideal NWFZ candidates: a good regional record of settling disputes peaceably, a long record of low defense expenditures within the zone, and the ability for a counter-move if a state in the zone does decide to pursue nuclear weapons. To achieve this counter-move capability, it is noted that the verification system put in place by the treaty should allow for a timely warning system in which another state could, in theory, retaliate against a noncompliant state. The counter-move capacity also dictates that at least two states within the zone should already possess peaceful nuclear technology as well as the capital, resources, and knowledge for the in-state nuclear industry to thrive.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the conditions that should be seen, or at least partially applicable, in regions that are candidates for a NWFZ, there are also the issues of verification and compliance necessary in ensuring the viability of the treaty. Legally, NWFZs should include their own system of verification measures and oversight, and compliance obligations.<sup>18</sup> In order for all parties to have confidence in the credibility and effectiveness of the treaty, a multi-level system of obligations should be monitored and verified. On a regional level, the treaty should establish a regional bureaucracy through which nuclear materials within a country is monitored and inspected, to prevent the channeling of the nuclear material from peaceful activities

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<sup>17</sup> Bellany, *Curbing the Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, 105.

<sup>18</sup> Freestone and Davidson, "Nuclear weapon-free zones," 180.

to a weapons program<sup>19</sup>. These kinds of regional organizations are implemented in the Tlatelolco, Pelindaba, and Bangkok NWFZ treaties. Additionally, the international level of NWFZ verification generally falls into the hands of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Implementing full-scale IAEA safeguards within each of the member parties ensures, on an international scale, that there is no nuclear weapons program within the state, and all fissionable materials are accounted for under peaceful nuclear activity parameters.<sup>20</sup> Each of the existing Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones require all parties to subject their nuclear programs to full IAEA inspections and implementation of all necessary and proper safeguards to ensure confidence on the part of the signatory parties.

Currently, there are four regional Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones: Africa (Treaty of Pelindaba), Southeast Asia (Treaty of Bangkok), South Pacific (Treaty of Rarotonga), and Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco). In addition to these major treaties establishing NWFZs, the five states of Central Asia declared a NWFZ in 2002, and Mongolia declared the only unilateral NWFZ in 1992. The Antarctic, Outer Space, and Seabed non-armament treaties have also been considered to follow under the umbrella of a NWFZ in that these treaties establish geographic areas that are to remain free of nuclear weapons, despite the regions of these treaties being ultimately uninhabited.

The Treaty of Tlatelolco, was the first treaty establishing a NWFZ in an populated region. Signed in 1967, the Latin American NWFZ, strongly supported by the United States and other nuclear powers, sets up the precedent of the conditions

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<sup>19</sup> Thakur, "Stepping Stones", 17.

<sup>20</sup> Thakur, "Stepping Stones," 17.

of a NWFZ. The summit negotiating the framework for the treaty included the viability and advantages of the NWFZ, the benefits of creating a regional verification commission, geographical boundaries, and the expectations of security guarantees by the nuclear powers (due to the impact of China's nuclear explosion around the time of the summit).<sup>21</sup> This framework established the minimum criteria for the discussion that must be in place for the establishment of a NWFZ and continue to make up the core considerations for regional arms control. This treaty established OPANAL to monitor the implementation and ensure continued compliance of treaty responsibilities. The regional organization's major contribution to Tlatelolco, and NWFZs in general, has been the progress it has made toward total implementation and universal compliance of the treaty's text. OPANAL has been critical in ensuring proper verification and thorough implementation of the NWFZ.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps most importantly, however, is the impact that the negotiation and implementation process has had on regional and international norms. The Treaty of Tlatelolco has created a regional shift toward nonproliferation and inspired the international community to look toward NWFZs as strong nonproliferation mechanisms.<sup>23</sup>

The Treaty of Rarotonga, which entered into force in 1986, was initiated by the largest power in the region, Australia. It established the South Pacific as a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone. Generally, the Rarotonga NWFZ is seen as less successful than Tlatelolco in that it does not establish a regional oversight commission, nor does it explicitly explain which aspects of proliferation it is actively

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<sup>21</sup> Serrano, Monica. "Latin America – The Treaty of Tlatelolco." In *Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones*, ed. Ramesh Thakur. (Great Britain: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998), 37.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 51.

preventing.<sup>24</sup> This treaty does prohibit the acquisition and stationing of nuclear weapons among those members states and territorial jurisdiction, but it did very little to prevent the transportation of nuclear materials, nuclear weapons communications and intelligence structures, command-and-control bases, and nuclear weapons delivery systems from its geographical boundaries. The signatories did not pursue active security guarantees from the nuclear weapons states. The nuclear powers are not constrained in their ability to use nuclear weapons from within the zone as long as it is not against member states.<sup>25</sup> The perceptions of Rarotonga as an effective regional and international arms control measure are divided. While some scholars do maintain its inherent ineffectiveness due to the lack of an established oversight bureaucracy and relaxed constraints on weapons-possessing countries, others see merit in the accomplishments of the treaty. For example, it ended French nuclear testing in the region through significant diplomatic pressures as well as brought international attention to the regional opposition to France's nuclear testing in the area.<sup>26</sup> Rarotonga negotiations and the subsequent implementation also served to inspire neighboring regions to look into the prospects of NWFZs. South East Asia, specifically through ASEAN, began discussion a regional arms control initiatives following the agreement at Rarotonga.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Bellany, *Curbing the Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, 114.

<sup>25</sup> Hamel-Green, Michael, "The South Pacific – The Treaty of Rarotonga." In *Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones*, ed. Ramesh Thakur. (Great Britain: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998), 59.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 70.



Due partly to the diplomatic success of the Rarotonga Treaty, the ASEAN states were inspired to implement their own NWFZ. The Treaty of Bangkok was signed in 1995 to establish Southeast Asia as a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone. Prior to the Treaty of Bangkok, the region was already internationally recognized as a “Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality”, and a NWFZ has been considered a logical progression of this regional ideology. Bangkok is similar to Rarotonga in that it does not establish a regional verification regime and defers to the safeguards and inspections already carried out through the IAEA. While it does not ban nuclear research within the zone, it goes beyond the scope of Rarotonga to prohibit development, manufacture, acquisition, possession, control, stationing, transport, testing, and use of nuclear weapons within any state in the jurisdiction.<sup>28</sup> This treaty does, however, suffer from many of the same perceived flaws as Rarotonga and is considered, by at least some critics, as more of a political statement than a regional commitment to nonproliferation. There are lax standards on air and sea transit and activities producing radioactive materials. This treaty also alienates the member states from the strategic interests of the established nuclear powers.<sup>29</sup> This not only weakens the international legitimacy of the region, but it also limits the prestige of such an arms control initiative. By reducing the United States’ and others’ security interests in the region, the SEANWFZ provides little security assurances to members and must continue to push for nuclear power support.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hernandez, Carolina G. “Southeast Asia – The Treaty of Bangkok.” In *Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones*, ed. Ramesh Thakur. (Great Britain: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998). 87.

<sup>29</sup> Bellany, *Curbing the Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, 117.

<sup>30</sup> Hernandez, “Southeast Asia,” 90-100.

The 1996 Treaty of Pelindaba establishes a NWFZ in Africa. Arms control scholars see Pelindaba as a closer ideal than the NWFZ established in Rarotonga or Bangkok<sup>31</sup>, as well as a success for the conflict-prone African continent<sup>32</sup>. The African NWFZ reserves the right for party members to pursue peaceful nuclear technology research and development domestically while also banning the production and use of nuclear weapons. The Organization of African Unity serves as the main body for regional legislation, and the Treaty establishes the African Commission on Nuclear Energy as the core verification and compliance mechanism for the NWFZ. The literature generally regards the Treaty of Pelindaba as a positive step towards nuclear disarmament. The common sentiments of anti-colonialism gave way to a push for denuclearization in Africa, where there were at least three states that had previously expressed interest in developing nuclear weapons capability. In order to analyze this NWFZ, it is necessary to understand the security complex of the region. The Treaty of Pelindaba represents a region with relatively low external conflict, despite the conflict-prone nature of internal African politics. The continent generally functions as a more unified security complex, and therefore the African NWFZ can be seen as a closer step towards ideal circumstances for developing a NWFZ.<sup>33</sup>

The case of denuclearization in Africa is unique due to the existence of a secret South African nuclear weapons program, which was completed and subsequently forfeited when the country acceded into the NPT. Essentially, the case

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<sup>31</sup> Bellany, *Curbing the Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, 114.

<sup>32</sup> Ihonvbere, Julius O. "Africa – The Treaty of Pelindaba," In *Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones*, ed. Ramesh Thakur. (Great Britain: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998), 93.

<sup>33</sup> Bellany, *Curbing the Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, 116.

of a nuclear South Africa paired with the eventual creation of a NWFZ on the African continent make a case that with the right security guarantees provided by both regional adversaries and international powers, the perceived external threats can be alleviated in such ways to overcome a state's internal desire to develop and possess nuclear weapons. Further analysis of the global impact of the African NWFZ generally show that this Treaty has developed into a challenge for the nuclear powers to follow the NWFZ protocols in a strategically important region with a history of conflict and proliferation. It redirected the nuclear debate, especially in the context of the developing world, from deterrence and nuclear arms buildup to a dialogue about peace and disarmament. The Treaty of Pelindaba, however, will likely continue to be a point of academic study as the continent continues to face serious social and political strife.

Criticisms of the Treaty of Pelindaba found in the literature indicates that it does not achieve the ideal characteristics of a NWFZ, and does not serve as a final means of continental disarmament. The provisions in Pelindaba provide a framework for substantive verification protocols, but the challenges lie in maintaining full implementation of these guidelines. As the continent of Africa develops, the uses for nuclear technology – be it peaceful or militaristic – will become more obvious and the Pelindaba provisions will continue to be challenged by this changing climate.<sup>34</sup>

The Middle East as a region has provided an interesting case study in nuclear proliferation. There have been many countries that have, or expressed interest in,

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<sup>34</sup> Ihonvbere, "Africa – The Treaty of Pelindaba," 116.

developing nuclear weapons. While a Middle East NWFZ has received significant attention in academic and political spheres over a long period of time, there has not been any real progress toward making any concrete steps facilitating NWFZ negotiations. The development of a *de facto* WMD-free zone in Iraq following the 1991 Gulf War has led to increased international attention on moving forward with a NWFZ in the entire region.<sup>35</sup> After the passage of the United Nations WMD-free zone in Iraq, the 2005 Iraqi Constitution reaffirmed the country's commitment to their international obligations, and has essentially already created a single-state NWFZ in the region, though it is not formally recognized as such.<sup>36</sup>

Aside from the *de facto* unilateral WMD-Free Zone in Iraq, the Middle East NWFZ process is at a virtual standstill. There is substantial literature making the case that a MENWFZ would be globally beneficial, and possibly even achievable in the future. The concept of the NWFZ in the region has been endorsed by international organizations, such as the UN, the NPT Review Conference, and the IAEA (with Mohammed el-Baradei formally announcing his support for opening the negotiation process).<sup>37</sup>

However, the existing literature generally analyzes the MENWFZ as a construct over time, and evaluates the plausibility in the terms of the existing challenges in the region. There are also some characteristics that are thought to be an integral to the MENWFZ that are region-specific and serve as necessary

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<sup>35</sup> Tabassi, Lisa. "National Implementation and Enforcement of Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone Treaties." *Nuclear Law Bulletin* 83 (2009), 40.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>37</sup> Christiansen, Poul-Erik and Dan Plesch. "Disarmament Education and Epistemic Communities: A Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone in the Middle East." *Palestine-Israel Journal* 16.3/4 (2010), 58.

preconditions or commitments that must be met before the NWFZ can be implemented. This treaty should be completed as part of an umbrella strategy to address the security concerns in the region, such as the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, the Persian Gulf instability, and the conflict between Israel and the Gulf region. Additionally, given the historical context of WMD usage in the region, the NWFZ should also go as far to address chemical and biological weapons as well as nuclear weapons and more general disarmament measures such as reductions in conventional capabilities as further confidence-building measures.<sup>38</sup>

The existing literature also builds a general consensus that Israel, as the sole nuclear power in the region, poses a significant challenge to NWFZ negotiation. There are various accounts for why Israel represents such an obstacle, with the most obvious and pressing being the states' already developed nuclear weapons arsenal, but the state has also always been skeptical of multilateral disarmament and arms control efforts. Internal factors, such as the Holocaust, are typically referenced by scholars who analyze Israel's approach to arms control. Furthermore, Israel has expressed interest in maintaining a nuclear monopoly over a nuclear deterrence in the region, and many Israeli policymakers have commented that their nuclear capabilities should serve as a stabilizing force in the Middle East, similar to Kenneth Waltz's nuclear stability theory.<sup>39</sup> Nonproliferation scholars also often cite that Israel will be highly unlikely to join a NWFZ until they receive full diplomatic

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<sup>38</sup> Bahgat, Gawdat, *Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 150.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 156.

recognition from the Arab world and the Iranians, as well as receive full peace accords with their Palestinian, Arab, and Iranian neighbors.

The literature is less unified about the challenges facing the MENWFZ from the perspective of the Arabs and Iranians. Generally, it is thought that these states would be more receptive to negotiations and regional denuclearization. Several Arab countries as well as Iran have sought to acquire nuclear weapons, but as much of the literature seems to suggest, the region's interest in nuclear weapons lies in the general distrust of the Israeli program. Iran and many of the Arabs do not see Israel's bomb as a "weapon of last resort" or defensive in nature, and are unlikely to trust a disarmament treaty with Israel.<sup>40</sup> The Israeli nuclear program is identified throughout the literature as the main factor for continued Iranian nuclear ambitions and perhaps the main hurdle to progress in arms control talks. Until Israel can successfully convey that it is, as a member of the Middle East region, ready to denuclearize and submit to the same regulations that are imposed on nuclear-ambitious Arab or Persian states.<sup>41</sup>

Additionally, the process of negotiating a NWFZ in the region will be challenging to the nuclear powers, especially the United States, who currently face credibility issues in the region. The literature suggests that the Middle Eastern states, with the exception of Israel, feel as though the U.S. has been one-sided in their nuclear policy toward the region and is not in a position to be involved in Middle Eastern affairs due to the overwhelming support for Israel. Many

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<sup>40</sup> Baumgart, Claudia and Harald Muller. "A Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East: A Pie in the Sky?" *The Washington Quarterly* 28(2004-05), 47-48.

<sup>41</sup> Bahgat, *Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East*, 158.

conclusions drawn in the literature also suggest that the U.S. should be subjected to preconditions to NWFZ negotiations, including steps such as pressuring Israel to close down the Dimona reactor, dismantle its nuclear program, and join the NPT.<sup>42</sup>

Looking at the picture painted by academic research and scholarly analysis, there are several consensus-building conclusions regarding whether or not the specific dynamics of the region present unique challenges to the NWFZ. There are several factors contributing to the Middle East's unique security climate in which the NWFZ would be developed. For example, the Middle East peace process is an ongoing struggle to achieve stability and reduce violence conflict in the region, and a NWFZ must take into account the delicate steps that have been taken towards achieving peace. The negotiations must be done in concurrence with the peace process and take into account the various peace measures in place or currently being discussed.<sup>43</sup> The other NWFZs that have been implemented globally did not require such a close relationship to other aspects of achieving peace and security within the designated region, and the Middle East peace process/NWFZ negotiations would be without true precedent.

## Research

### *Saudi Arabia/Gulf States*

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<sup>42</sup> Bahgat, Gawdat. "Prospects for a Nuclear-Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East," *World Affairs* 4(2007), 166-167.

<sup>43</sup> Steinberg, Gerald M. "The Obstacles to a Middle East NWFZ." In *Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones*, ed. Ramesh Thakur. (Great Britain: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998), 206-207.

Currently, Saudi Arabia is not thought to have an active nuclear weapons program, and has traditionally been an advocate for denuclearization in the region. As far back as 1974, Saudi Arabia, along with Egypt, began discussing the prospects of establishing the Middle East as a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone, but recognized the difficulties that such a Zone would face. The Kingdom then sought to limit the size and scope of the Zone in question, to originally just the Persian Gulf region, and then continuing expansion throughout the Middle Eastern region.<sup>44</sup> It is likely that Saudi Arabia is threatened by the nuclear programs of its regional adversaries, namely Israel and Iran, who either currently possess or are moving towards possession of nuclear weapons. By advocating for denuclearization, the Kingdom can reduce the threats posed by regional nuclear weapons programs without having to necessarily develop their own nuclear capabilities. Today, Saudi Arabia has condemned the Israeli occupation of Arab land, and believes that the nuclear-armed state is the main cause for instability in the region. The Kingdom has also opposed Israel's regional nuclear monopoly, and has cited a NWFZ in the region as a potential solution to both the injustice and instability brought about by Israel's role as the Middle East's sole nuclear power.<sup>45</sup>

Since the creation of the state of Israel, Saudi Arabia has expressed resentment towards it and has not officially recognized the state. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia, as the preeminent Sunni Muslim state in the Middle East, has lent its support to Palestinian opposition groups, like Hamas and Islamic Jihad. However,

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<sup>44</sup> Harrison, Selig S. "The Forgotten Bargain: Nonproliferation and Nuclear Disarmament," *World Policy Journal* (2006), 12.

<sup>45</sup> Bahgat, Gawdat. "Nuclear Proliferation: The Case of Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Journal* 60 (2006), 426-427.



unlike Saudi Arabia's more aggressive neighbors, it has generally refrained from outright violent conflict with Israel. It has pursued diplomatic engagement with Western powers, namely the United States; to put more pressure on Israel to scale back both its nuclear and conventional defense initiatives.<sup>46</sup> Politically, the Saudi strategy can be seen in terms of pressure on Israel for their nuclear program and the United States for allowing it to progress.

With respect to Saudi security imperatives, the Kingdom generally relies on its strategic partnership with the United States for security and military matters. However, the Saudis have expressed concern with the reliability of the United States' security assurances, and are becoming more likely to turn toward other potential means of security guarantees, such as regional nonproliferation treaties.<sup>47</sup> Regional competition with Iran has also been shown to be a threat to Saudi Arabia. These countries, the two largest oil-rich countries in the region, have experienced economic rivalry within and outside of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, where they pursue different strategic relationships with the United States and other major powers despite the two states' policy cooperation with respect to oil producing and pricing strategies. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has been reluctant to publically take a strong stand on the Iranian nuclear program or the diplomatic hardships between Iran and the West<sup>48</sup>, indicating that the Kingdom would not support nuclearization in the region, and would be likely to favor disarmament negotiations.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 427.

<sup>47</sup> Russell, Richard L. "A Saudi Nuclear Option?" *Survival* 43 (2001) 70-71.

<sup>48</sup> Gawdat, Bahgat, "Nuclear Proliferation," 430-432.

As for the other states in the Persian Gulf region – Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates – there is much to suggest that they would likely be receptive to NWFZ talks. While these states, especially the UAE, have expressed interest in developing civil nuclear power reactors, there is no clear indicator that these states intend to weaponize this technology.<sup>49</sup> These states do, however, have a geostrategic interest in following the Iranian nuclear program, as all face not only severe environmental consequences from an Iranian nuclear disaster, but also their close geographical proximity to the regional rival increase the security dilemma present among these smaller, less dominant countries.<sup>50</sup>

Under the ideal criteria of a NWFZ, these are the states that should be most likely to be receptive to this treaty, since regionally, these are the most vulnerable to the will of the larger regional players. Since these states lack the clout to be a major threat within the region, the literature and theories about NWFZs seems to indicate that such a treaty would solve their insecurity dilemmas and they would stand to benefit greatly from the disarmament of the larger, more threatening countries. For example, following the 1991 Gulf War, Iran began to occupy several Persian Gulf islands previously controlled by the UAE. In its efforts to restore sovereignty over these islands, the UAE has been continuing to garner the support of the other Gulf States (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia) and the Arab League to pressure Iran to pull out of these islands and relinquish territorial control over

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<sup>49</sup> Jackson, Ian. "Nuclear Energy and Proliferation Risks: Myths and Realities in the Persian Gulf." *International Affairs* 85 (2009), 1170-1172.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 1170; Bahgat, Gawdat, "Nuclear Proliferation," 431.

Emirati land.<sup>51</sup> This dispute could be a strong indicator of Gulf region solidarity in matters concerning regional rival Iran and a fundamental reliance on international procedures and allowing regional jurisdiction over conflict.

All of the states in the Gulf Region, with the exceptions of Saudi Arabia and Yemen have signed and ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Bahrain, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, and Oman have all ratified this treaty, revealing an interest in international nonproliferation efforts and perhaps a generally positive attitude towards negotiations for a MENWFZ. Looking at the regional interests of Saudi Arabia and the other, smaller Persian Gulf States, there are some strong indicators that a MENWFZ would be not only in their strategic interests, but also that they would be willing to proceed with negotiations for a treaty to both end Israel's nuclear monopoly in the region and reduce the risks posed to the area by the ever-increasing threat of Iranian nuclear proliferation.

### *Iraq*

Iraq is an interesting case study in arms control, having had both an active nuclear program as well as chemical weapons program. Under Saddam Hussein, Iraq maintained a developing nuclear weapons program, but it was subsequently stalled by the 1991 Gulf War. When the international community became fully aware of the extent to which Hussein's regime was developing nuclear weapons after the United States invasion, the legitimacy of the international nonproliferation regime was even called into question. The revelation of such an extensive WMD program highlighted many of the inadequacies of relying solely on the NPT and

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<sup>51</sup> Bahgat, Gawdat, "Nuclear Proliferation," 431.

IAEA inspection and verification system to seek out and ultimately limit nuclear proliferation.<sup>52</sup>

With much international attention placed on the Iraqi WMD program under Saddam Hussein, and many regional factors making Iraq a unique situation in international arms control, there were many indicators that Iraq would continue to be a problem for nonproliferation. The robust non-conventional military developments in Iraq, and also the Middle East more broadly, has created increased difficulties for the international community to create a coherent and effective arms control strategy in the region.

The Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s highlights extensive WMD programs within the region, especially in Iraq. The deeply entrenched strategic rivalry between Iraq and Iran is perhaps that largest driving factor to Saddam's WMD program and the various steps taken to safeguard this from international scrutiny.<sup>53</sup> Even predating Saddam Hussein's rise to power in Iraq, Iran was seen as a very real security threat as the two nations vie for regional domination<sup>54</sup>. As long as this rivalry exists, there will likely be a strategic interest in maintaining non-conventional capabilities, especially as Iranian nuclear weapons development continues. In addition to the Iranian threat, Iraq has always seen Israel as an existential threat to Arab existence. Developing WMD as a counterbalancing strategy to Israel's "nuclear opacity" has

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<sup>52</sup> Pilat, Joseph F. "Iraq and the Future of Nuclear Nonproliferation: The Roles of Inspections and Treaties." *Science* 255 (1992), 1224.

<sup>53</sup> Bahgat, Gawdat. "Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: Iraq and Iran," *Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies* 28 (2003), 427.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 432.

been a strong factor in Iraq's nuclear weapons program<sup>55</sup>, and will likely continue to weigh on Iraqi policymakers until a robust and credible disarmament agreement can be reached in the region.

However, Iraq has undertaken substantial changes following the 2003 United States invasion and ultimate removal of Saddam Hussein from power. The new Iraqi government has begun to take various steps toward credibly following through with international nonproliferation obligations. The new Iraqi government, since the Constitution of Iraq was signed in 2005, has signed and ratified both the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention protocols. Indicating that the Iraq of today is behaving differently than during the Saddam Hussein era, there are some actions taken by the state that could show that it would be receptive to NWFZ negotiations. While the country continues to be somewhat unstable internally, the push for a WMD-Free zone within the state indicates a more broad-based commitment to nonproliferation and regional disarmament, as well as closer relations with its adversaries such as the United States and Iran. Security concerns with Iran and Israel will be problematic for the newly forming regime, but the progression of NWFZ dialogue towards complete regional disarmament could serve to build confidence within Iraqi policymakers that a NWFZ treaty would be in their strategic interest.

### *Egypt*

The current political climate of Egypt is clearly tumultuous, and it would be premature to attempt to evaluate the future behavior of the country during its

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 428-429.

political transition period, however, Egypt has been a strong proponent of a MENWFZ since Iran introduced the idea in 1974.<sup>56</sup> Egypt has, in the past, expressed interest in not only chemical weapons and missile technology, but also a nuclear weapons program. While today they openly deny any possession of WMD or nuclear weapons, the interest in developing non-conventional capabilities in the 1950s can largely be seen as a response to the Israeli push toward nuclearization.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to advocating publically for a NWFZ in the Middle East, Egypt is also a member of the NWFZ in place in Africa. The Treaty of Pelindaba was signed in Cairo, with Hosni Mubarak taking a leadership role in the ceremonial aspects of the treaty, believing Egypt should have a central position in the African NWFZ. Given that Egypt has found NWFZ implementation in their interest within their African community, it leaves the door open to consideration of a similar arrangement with their Arab community. Egypt is the most populated country in the Arab world, and is largely seen as a major cultural center and “soft power” rich state in the region<sup>58</sup>, and can therefore not be overlooked as a major player in the development of the MENWFZ.

For example, Egypt has linked its own ratification of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention to Israeli ratification of the NPT, believing that both of these treaties are integral steps toward removing WMD from the Middle East, but also attempting to hold on to security assurances to balance against Israel.<sup>59</sup> Egypt,

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<sup>56</sup> Harrison, Selig S. “The Forgotten Bargain,” 12.

<sup>57</sup> Bahgat, Gawdat. “Nuclear Proliferation: Egypt.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 43 (2007), 410.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 409.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 410.

however, was unable to secure all of the necessary components to develop a nuclear weapons program from foreign nations, and turned toward arms control negotiations with regional adversaries. After making peace with Israel, Egypt finally ratified the NPT in 1981, but remained unable to procure nuclear power reactors due to safety concerns of the time.<sup>60</sup> Going into the 1995 NPT Review Conference, then-President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak claimed that Egypt would veto extending the nonproliferation treaty unless Israel, a non-signatory to the Treaty, signs the agreement. Concerned with the future of the NPT, Japan and Egypt agreed on a nuclear cooperative arrangement.<sup>61</sup>

Former President Mubarak, however, was not vitally interest in nuclear technology for Egypt, and generally relied on other strategies to counter Israeli nuclear forces. Furthermore, following the peace accords between Israel and Egypt, the United States had developed a close relationship with Mubarak, providing substantial foreign aid to Egypt and expressing vital strategic interests in Egyptian stability.<sup>62</sup> While Mubarak is no longer in power in Egypt, the peace treaty maintaining the close ties with the United States remains in effect, and Egypt continues to have diplomatic recognition of Israel. Moving forward with a NWFZ would be dependent on the emergence of a new, stable government to take form in Egypt which will maintain the cease-fire with Israel as well as the uphold the peace accords that have been in effect since Sadat's regime. If the new Egyptian government responds to international nonproliferation obligations in a similar way

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 413.

<sup>61</sup> Washio, Ako, "Egypt would veto NPT extension unless Israel signs," Japan Times, March 27, 1995, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Bahgat, Gawdat, "Egypt," 419.

to its past rulers, the NWFZ concept could regain popularity among the Egyptian leadership.

### *Israel*

Clearly, one of the most significant hurdles to the creation of a MENWFZ is nuclear-armed Israel. As a Jewish state in the Middle East, non-signatory to the NPT, and the sole nuclear power in the region, Israel has a unique and critically important role in not only initiating the negotiations of a NWFZ but also the long-term success of any such agreement. Typically considered as the primary security concern for its Arab neighbors, Israel is absolutely critical to the success of NWFZ negotiations. It is unlikely that any other state would consider joining such a treaty if Israel is permitted to continue its “nuclear opacity” doctrine and retain their nuclear monopoly in the region. Furthermore, as a major ally to the United States in the region, Israel is in a unique position to, with the help of the United States reinstate the peace process with the Arabs, which is generally accepted in the literature as an integral first step to initiation of NWFZ talks.

Israel is located in a hostile neighborhood, in which the majority of the surrounding countries have refused to acknowledge the state’s right to exist, and lives in constant conflict with the Palestinian territories, making it especially challenging to make a case that Israel will find it in their strategic interests to forfeit a nuclear deterrent without a reliable regional nuclear nonproliferation treaty. Unless Israel can be confident that its regional enemies would not pursue nuclear weapons to be used against them once their bombs are dismantled. Though the Israelis maintain a highly capable military force and enjoy significant security



guarantees from the United States, there are incentives for the state to hold on to its nuclear deterrent until it can be convinced that states such as Iran are not going to “cheat” and develop nuclear weapons.

Given the security climate Israel is faced with, it is widely seen that their “nuclear opacity” doctrine is the only true policy it could have adopted and enjoys almost universal support by Israeli security strategists.<sup>63</sup> This strategy is, however, incompatible with the progression of the MENWFZ. Israel has expressed support for nonproliferation measure and protections against nuclear terrorism, but is not subjected to NPT Article 6 obligations (as it is not a party to the NPT). In order for Israel to credibly move forward with an NWFZ proposal, the state would need to acknowledge the Article 6 provisions as well as explicitly demonstrate that their support of the NWFZ also signals support for the Article 6 aims and goals and application across the Middle East.<sup>64</sup>

The Israeli nuclear program developed as a result of various factors, one significant of which being the threat of an attack by a unified Arab community, which would overwhelm the conventional capabilities of Israel and ensure the state’s destruction.<sup>65</sup> Today, however, this is far less of a threat to Israel since the Arab world is less unified than during the time of the initiation of the nuclear program. However, this security concern could potentially be further counterbalanced by a unification of the Middle East as a region through the engagement of the NWFZ talks concurrent with the peace process. Once the threat

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<sup>63</sup> Cohen, Avner, and Marvin Miller. “Bringing Israel’s Bomb out of the Basement,” *Foreign Affairs* 89 (2010).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Bahgat, Gawdat. *Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East*. 90.

of an attack by a unified Arab force is eliminated altogether, the necessity of a nuclear deterrent diminishes. Since Israeli policymakers have generally seen their nuclear monopoly as a “stabilizing” force in the region<sup>66</sup>, the NWFZ talks should address the WMD counterbalancing strategy employed by the Arab states and the subsequent regional destabilization.

At the core of the Israeli position are the state’s prerequisites for moving forward with a NWFZ. Official Israeli policy dictates that the Jewish state will not move forward with disarmament talks until the Arab community moves forward with the peace process. Israel demands full recognition on the part of the Arab states and Iran. Peace treaties are not sufficient to satisfy Israel’s distrust of their neighbors, the prerequisites for the NWFZ would require full normalization of diplomatic relations with all Middle Eastern states as well as commercial and economic ties and true ceasefire agreements.<sup>67</sup> Because Israel has committed itself to not giving up its “nuclear option” or moving forward with any arms control negotiations until the Arabs and Iranians have met these conditions, the NWFZ must be integrated into the peace process, allowing for dialogue and negotiations for regional peace and stability, and then disarmament. Politically, it is unlikely that Israel would be able to negotiate a treaty with the rest of the region in which they are permitted to maintain nuclear weapons while the rest of the region is not. These states are generally threatened by the Israeli nuclear monopoly and addressing this issue is going to have to be at the core of the principles that are negotiated.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 156.

*Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon*

During its rotation on the United Nations' Security Council in 2003, Syria announced its support for a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in the Middle East. This announcement, made on behalf of the 22 Arab countries was implicitly aimed at Israel and its regional nuclear monopoly and is generally seen as a response to the revelation of the Libyan nuclear program. Garnering support from the Organization of Islamic Conference and the 117-member Non-Aligned Movement, Syria has gained the approval of many disarmament and peace advocates.<sup>68</sup> However, Syria has engaged in significant military conflicts with Israel and is broadly recognized as a state-sponsor of terrorism in the United States and elsewhere. Syria is also a close ally of Iran, who is currently actively seeking nuclear weapons.

Although the relationship between Syria and Iran has been traditionally close, there are also reasons to suggest that Syria is shifting away from the Islamic Republic. For example, Syria has recently made some diplomatic concessions toward its Arab neighbors, and even the United States.<sup>69</sup> The rapprochement between Syria and its traditional rivals could indicate a shift in Syrian foreign policy and an increased slant towards regional dialogue.

Some scholars regard Syria as a case of nonproliferation successes. Though there is debate about the circumstances, some argue that the state had attempted to pursue nuclear weapons, but was deterred by the threat of military retaliation

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<sup>68</sup> Thalif, Dee. "Disarmament: Syria asks Nuclear-Free Middle East (Israel, that is)," *Global Information Network* (New York: 2003).

<sup>69</sup> Bahgat, Gawdat. "Egypt and Iran: The 30-Year Estrangement," *Middle East Policy* 16 (2009), 52.

against them.<sup>70</sup> However, it is clear that Syria has pursued nuclear technologies “with suspicious intentions” and it remains to be seen if it would alter its nuclear ambitions in the event that the Iranian program was halted or suspended.<sup>71</sup> Syria also does not have a peace treaty with neighboring Israel and would likely be unwilling to move forward with NWFZ talks unless Israel agreed to make changes to its nuclear doctrine. The preconditions for negotiations set out by Israel are also very much pertinent to Syria, given that the two states have a history of conflict and hostility. Moving forward, Syria’s role in the NWFZ would be dependent on the role of Iran in the negotiations as well as the progression of the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Lebanon has taken a less influential role in the regional politics of the Middle East. On the verge of internal civil war and political discourse allowing terrorist groups such as Hezbollah to rise to power, Lebanon is generally not a focus on the nonproliferation discussion. Regional engagement, however, has the potential to be in Lebanon’s interest, helping to move Hezbollah away from Iranian influence and towards a more active and constructive part in the political process and less its role as a paramilitary organization fighting against Israel.<sup>72</sup> As a signatory to the major international arms control agreements, such as the NPT, CTBT, and CWC, Lebanon is likely responsive to regional disarmament negotiations, especially if it means its largest external security threat, Israel, is required to forfeit its nuclear capability.

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<sup>70</sup> Katz, J.I. “Lessons Learned from Nonproliferation Successes and Failures.” *Comparative Strategy* 27 (2008), 427.

<sup>71</sup> Spector, L.S. “Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East.” *Orbis* 36 (1992), 16-17.

<sup>72</sup> Takeyh, Ray. “Time for Detente With Iran.” *Foreign Affairs* 86 (2007), 32.

Jordan would likely be receptive to the MENWFZ. Jordan has a peace agreement with Israel and has signed and ratified other pertinent international arms control treaties. Jordan is one of a few Arab countries to enact diplomatic and economic ties with Israel despite having had military conflicts in the past.<sup>73</sup> Recognizing that Israel is going to be a permanent fixture in the region and thus it is in their rational interest to develop mutually beneficial relations with the state rather than maintain constant conflict and distrust, Jordan is a rational player in the region but lacks the size and clout to make it an influential regional power. King Abdullah II of Jordan has repeatedly spoken out against the looming security threat he deems the “Shiite Crescent”, or Iran’s ever-encroaching influence over the areas under traditional Sunni control (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan).

The delicate balance of power described by King Abdullah II is essential to Jordanian security incentives. Having interests in reducing the likelihood of an Israeli nuclear attack as well as the encroaching Iranian influence, Jordan is in a position to advocate for the Sunni states in the region to support NWFZ talks in an attempt to reduce the potential for ethnic conflict and maintain the delicate sectarian balance that has existed in the region.

### *Iran*

Iran poses a significant threat to not only regional adversaries, but also to the entirety of the international nonproliferation regime. The Islamic Republic has been pursuing uranium enrichment capabilities for what is generally suspected to be to develop a nuclear weapons arsenal. The state has made threatening remarks to

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<sup>73</sup> Bahgat, Gawdat. *Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East*. 100.

Israel, absolutely refusing to recognize the Jewish state or its right to exist. In a struggle for regional hegemony, Iran has shown itself to be a serious and influential player and must be treated as such when pursuing the NWFZ negotiations. Iran does not view Israeli nuclear technology as a purely defensive “weapon of last resort”, and believes that the Israeli nuclear program is the greatest threat to the region and the largest factor contributing to the Middle East’s constant conflict and instability.<sup>74</sup> Iran also believes that the West has meddled in Middle Eastern affairs with a double standard toward Israel, seeing the United States as assisting Israel with its nuclear infrastructure while actively working to prevent them from acquiring the same technology.<sup>75</sup>

Iran is, however, a party to the NPT and has expressed interest in the past in developing a NWFZ in the Middle East. In 1974, Iran was the original state to suggest moving forward with complete regional disarmament in the form of an NWFZ, and Saudi Arabia and Egypt followed the Iranian precedent. Iran, along with many of its Arab neighbors, see an implementation of an NWFZ as a means of counteracting the Israeli nuclear monopoly and beginning to create the framework for peace and stability in the area. Regional denuclearization, which brought about a nuclear-weapons free region in which no state possesses nuclear weapons, would serve to reduce Israel’s “nuclear intimidation”, thereby allowing for more channels for Arab-Israeli-Iranian dialogue and opening up the peace process.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Bahgat, Gawdat. “Prospects for a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in the Middle East,” 167.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 167.

In addition to the threats posed by a nuclear Israel, historically, Iraq had posed significant security threats to Iran. The Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s was largely influential on not only Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, but also on the newly formed Iranian government. The use of biological and chemical weapons during this war led to increased insecurity in Iran-Iraq relations, but also increased the regional shift toward this type of non-conventional military capabilities as a deterrent strategy and a balance against Israeli nuclear forces.<sup>77</sup> With Saddam Hussein out of power in Iraq and the Iraqi government shifting toward international cooperation and treaty compliance, the threats posed to Iran are significantly reduced, indicating that the NWFZ could gain more support by Iranian policymakers.

### Analysis and Conclusions

While various organizations and members of the academic community have repeatedly articulated the benefits of a NWFZ in the Middle East, the reality of politics makes this a far more complicated issue than a security climate analysis can convey. Given the many obstacles facing a MENWFZ, there continues to be support, at least rhetorically, for progress on this treaty. This begs the question, however, of why there would continue to be support for this treaty, even in the face of so many various challenges and security barriers. Looking into the political climate that has created a resurgence in pressure for a Middle East NWFZ demonstrates that there are several potential complex factors and motives for continued public interest.

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<sup>77</sup> Thakur, "Stepping Stones," 25.

Israel and Iran present specific problems for the NWFZ; and the international community has enacted inconsistent policies towards negotiating and implementing the treaty. Politically, there are many complicated issues concerning the United States, Israel, and the other relevant parties that serve as a potential motive for pushing for an improbable NWFZ in the region.

The United States has been a strong ally of Israel, which is largely unrecognized by the rest of the region. Dealing with the issue of the Israeli nuclear arsenal is central not only to the states involved in the region, but also to the United States, which would have to take a position regarding the MENWFZ, which would be critical to United States nonproliferation efforts' success and credibility.<sup>78</sup> During the 2010 NPT Review Conference, Egypt proposed another step forward in negotiating a MENWFZ, calling for the United States to reveal all information about the Israeli nuclear program as well as all transfers of nuclear materials and expertise from the U.S. to Israel. Implicating the United States in the push for denuclearization of the Middle East sends a message, at least symbolically, that the international community and regional players see the United States-Israel relationship as a threat to nonproliferation. However, the United States has supported Israel in matters pertaining to Israeli security for decades, even arguing that Israel should not be required to discuss its weapons capabilities with any state that recognizes its existence.<sup>79</sup> The relationship between the United States and Israel, especially with respect to Israel's "nuclear opacity" doctrine, complicates

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<sup>78</sup> Pincus, Walter. "How Israel complicates efforts against Iran." *Washington Post*. May 4, 2010.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



progression on the MENWFZ, especially when Israel's adversaries see the superpowers and Israel as the main obstacles to making official progress on the treaty.<sup>80</sup>

The United States, and to a lesser extent, Israel have placed rhetorical emphasis on pursuing the NWFZ in concurrence with progression of the peace process. The United States has long been interested in facilitating peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, with much of U.S. policy toward the region revolving around pursuing peace treaties between Israel and its neighbors, so it seems logical that the United States would pursue a MENWFZ in the context of the peace process. Though the peace process is generally an ambiguous term, what is generally called the "peace process" has taken various forms and the conflict has manifested itself in many different ways. The NWFZ, at least in the way that it has been characterized by the United States, serves as an appropriate mechanism to bring the Middle Eastern countries together to facilitate peace and stability. While the U.S. does not believe that Israeli nuclear weapons should be on the negotiating table with respect to the NWFZ, both the U.S. and Israel have agreed that in order to negotiations to take place, Arab states would have to recognize Israel's right to exist and accept diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, thus paving the way for a more concrete peace process and arms control negotiations. Given the clear policy objectives that a NWFZ negotiation would bring about, it seems plausible that the United States and Israel would support the NWFZ from a rhetorical and even political standpoint, and shift the responsibility to meet certain preconditions outlined through the various

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<sup>80</sup> *Nuclear weapons-free Middle East will strengthen NPT*. Mehr news agency, November 9, 2006.

U.S. peace plans. The United States could simultaneously advance its own nonproliferation and Middle East peace process goals while maintaining a rhetorical stance in favor of the NWFZ without needing to take an active role in facilitating the NWFZ.

Additionally, Middle Eastern countries, among others, have criticized the United States for a double standard with regards to its nonproliferation policies. Some have seen both American possession of nuclear weapons and its tolerance of the Israeli nuclear arsenal while simultaneously arguing for a nuclear-free world as evidence of this double standard when it comes to nuclear policy.<sup>81</sup> Essentially, the importance of the United States in the MENWFZ is clearly not underestimated, and the regional players and international community understand that pushing for a MENWFZ would put the U.S. in a position where it will be forced to move toward a more coherent nuclear nonproliferation policy.

The push for a MENWFZ, especially on the part of the Egyptians in the recent NPT Review Conference, is also problematic for U.S. policymakers, given that Israel is a strong ally. Israel feels as though the push for the NWFZ can be seen as a means of separating Israel from its closest ally. Israeli analysis of the Egyptian proposal see the move as “blackmail” on the part of the Arab nation to get the United States to take a stand either with Israel or with global disarmament. The proposal, described as “cynically abusing” President Obama’s ultimate goals of nuclear disarmament, is not favored by Israel and leaves the United States stuck between its relationship with Israel and pushing for a NWFZ. The United States has generally not spoken

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

publically of Israel's nuclear arsenal and has acknowledged that it would not use the Israeli arsenal as a means of negotiating with other states, namely Iran. This policy, however, cannot stand when assessing the prospects of an NWFZ. The U.S. must take a position regarding the Israeli arsenal, even if it is an attempt by the Arab states to diplomatically "blackmail" the United States and pressure Israel into negotiations, as some suggest.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to putting diplomatic and international pressure on the United States, the NWFZ in the region has also been advocated for in the context of pressuring Israel to accede to the NPT. For example, in 1998, Egypt and Iran released statements condemning the Israelis for not adhering to either the NPT or IAEA safeguard protocols and calling on their accession to the NPT as a precursor for NWFZ progress.<sup>83</sup> With both the United States and Israel at the present time unwilling to negotiate the terms of the Israeli arsenal, demands on the part of the Arab NWFZ supporters will likely go unmet. Politically, both sides of this issue have strong incentives to want to pursue a NWFZ treaty, but just as strong incentives to not push the issue further than rhetoric.

The MENWFZ could also be seen in the context of a vehicle to put pressure on Iran to surrender its nuclear program and submit to international nonproliferation protocol. Egypt has called on the NWFZ to address the situation in Iran, demonstrating the benefits of such an arrangement to both the NPT regime and the regional players, who could gain a voice in negotiations by dealing with the Iranian

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<sup>82</sup> Landau, Emily B. *Who's afraid of a nuke-free zone in the Middle East?* Jerusalem Post, April 26, 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Safe Abdur Rahim. *Egypt, Iran concerned at Israeli N-policy*. Arab News. May 7, 1998.

program.<sup>84</sup> The United States, Israel, Arab nations, and other world powers have expressed concern over the Iranian nuclear program, and the NWFZ can be seen in terms of creating a regional norm to address the underlying concerns of the Iranian leadership, assuming the Iranians are pursuing the bomb due to their own security concerns. The NWFZ, viewed through a political lens, could be a mechanism to build confidence among the countries in the region that Iran can halt its nuclear program under the right international conditions. Further demonstrating the rhetorical value of calling for a NWFZ, putting pressure on Iran to negotiate about its nuclear program and ultimately restore its commitment to NPT obligations is another likely reason for the increased international interest in a MENWFZ.

Furthermore, the politics of arms control aside, a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone has no real precedence in regions where arms control has already been of utmost concern. When compared with the existing NWFZs, the MENWFZ already faces unparalleled challenges given the regional dynamics in such a conflict-prone and nuclear ambitious region, such as the Middle East. There has not been an NWFZ implemented in a region where there is an established, albeit ambiguous, nuclear power. There has never been an occurrence where a NWFZ was used to prevent a state from getting nuclear weapons in the midst of a working program nor has this particular type of treaty been implemented as a means of denuclearizing a state that already possess nuclear weapons. Looking at the existing NWFZs, they have all been enacted in regions where nuclear weapons were not such an integral part of the

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<sup>84</sup> *Egypt: Nuclear-free Mideast essential to settling Iran issue*, Jerusalem Post, April 29, 2010.

security climate in the region, and thus their implementation was symbolically important but amounts to little true arms control precedent.

The Treaties of Rarotonga and Bangkok are largely considered flawed as far as NWFZ treaties, fulfilling symbolic aims rather than true nonproliferation goals. For example, the South Pacific NWFZ is largely considered to be a political response to the French nuclear testing in the region.<sup>85</sup> Rarotonga, along with predecessor Treaty of Tlatelolco, has largely been credited with creating regional norms for nonproliferation and allowing the other NWFZs in Southeast Asian and Africa to develop. However, Africa's Treaty of Pelindaba has not been entered into force and cannot serve as a true precedent for a MENWFZ, even though the two areas have more similarities than the other NWFZ regions.

The rhetorical push for a Middle East Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone has certainly had its fair share of political and symbolic advocacy. Given the MENWFZs' history as having had limited success as arms control vehicle, there is likely no real substantive progress to be made on deciding how to truly implement an effective regional agreement. Though the major nuclear powers, to various extents, as well as several regional players have publically supported the ideal of moving towards a MENWFZ, but there has been a clear lack of any constructive actions beyond rhetoric and diplomatic pressure on adversarial regimes on the part of the United States, Israel, Egypt, Iran, and others.

The conclusions that can be drawn from a state-by-state analysis of the regional players about the prospects of developing a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in

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<sup>85</sup> Hamel-Green, Michael. "The South Pacific – The Treaty of Rarotonga," 71.

the Middle East reveal, among others, a long and complicated negotiation process, full of distrust and wariness of the other regional actors. While the conditions in the region seem to fit as best as any region could the ideal characteristics of an NWFZ as described by the United Nations as well as nonproliferation scholars, the historical and cultural factors reveal a far more complex reality. The security climate of the region is generally built on mistrust and skepticism toward the other states (namely Israel and Iran), the Western powers, and the international nonproliferation regime. The analysis shows that while each state in the region has individual security imperatives in which an NWFZ could be in their national interest, many of the states also have a security doctrine and many political constraints that depends on the denuclearization of Israel and the progression of the Middle Eastern peace process, which has been at a virtual standstill since its inception with the end of the European mandate system.

The evidence suggests that the regional actors are receptive to international treaties. Table 1 demonstrates that all of the states in the region have either signed or ratified a major international arms control treaty, providing data about when the various Middle Eastern states signed or ratified the NPT, CTBT, and CWC. This data is significant because it demonstrates which states have adopted various measures to reduce the proliferation of WMD in the region, and at what point in time the policymakers took these steps. For example, the data shows very clearly that Iraq did not sign the CTBT or the CWC until after Saddam Hussein was removed from power, but the NPT was signed during the development of the Israeli nuclear program. This could indicate that the peaceful nuclear technology awarded to NPT

signatories was important to the Iraqi leadership, but the subsequent arms control agreements were not favored by Hussein's regime and were not signed until the new government came into power.

Furthermore, state-level analysis shows that in every state, not only Israel, the NWFZ must be negotiated as part of a regional peace process, though there is some disagreement among the literature and between the various states as to what the peace process would entail and which process should come first. Until there is a more distinct roadmap for how to achieve peace in the region, it is unlikely that negotiations for a NWFZ will take priority over the other pressing security concerns in the region, especially with all the political constraints motives inherent in the NWFZ rhetoric. The "peace process", while it is generally associated with United States and Israeli policy towards the Palestinian question, it also must address the various factors that cause the other states in the region concern, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. Bringing all the states together to determine multilaterally what steps must be taken to move more towards a situation where regional peace is a real possibility is a critical initial step in moving the NWFZ talk from political rhetoric and diplomatic pressure on "rogue" states into a serious consideration and real future nonproliferation prospect.

Additionally, there are serious credibility issues embedded in the inter-state relations in the Middle East, as well as between the United States and the Arab states. These issues must be addressed before the peace process or NWFZ conditions can even begin to be negotiated. Israel, as the perceived "nuclear aggressor" in the region, must credibly convince its Arab counterparts that it is truly

willing to move toward disarmament and actively pursue not only peace with the Arab world but also a nuclear weapons-free Middle East.

It does seem as though there is a general consensus among both the international community and the Middle Eastern states that a NWFZ in the region would increase security and stability, and lend itself toward facilitating peace in the conflict-prone and volatile area, but the disagreement comes in the implementation of such a region. However, the fact remains that, for the reasons discussed above as well as additional factors that prevent any progression from being made, the MENWFZ remains at a standstill. With new regional powers seeking to proliferate and others attempting to rebuild their government or prevent a civil war from breaking out within its borders, the NWFZ has not been a diplomatic priority, but can be seen as a rhetorical tool for advancing individual foreign policy goals. This Treaty will likely not become a true priority until the Middle East, as a region, experiences an awakening in which the current state of proliferation and counterbalancing is no longer effective in deterring attack or maintaining its fragile stability. It is unclear whether or not this will ever truly take shape, but the academic consensus is to move in the direction of a denuclearized Middle East.



Table 1: Middle Eastern states' status on major global nonproliferation treaties.

Country	NPT <sup>1</sup>	CTBT <sup>2</sup>		CWC <sup>3</sup>	
		Status	Year	Status	Year
<b>Bahrain</b>	1988	Ratified	2004	Ratified	1997
<b>Egypt</b>	1981	Signed	1996		
<b>Israel</b>		Signed	1996	Signed	1993
<b>Iran</b>	1970	Signed	1996	Ratified	1997
<b>Iraq</b>	1969	Signed	2008	Ratified	2009
<b>Jordan</b>	1970	Ratified	1998	Ratified	1997
<b>Kuwait</b>	1989	Ratified	2003	Ratified	1997
<b>Lebanon</b>	1970	Ratified	2008	Ratified	2008
<b>Oman</b>	1997	Ratified	2003	Ratified	1995
<b>Qatar</b>	1989	Ratified	1997	Ratified	1997
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	1988			Ratified	1996
<b>Syria</b>	1968				
<b>UAE</b>	1995	Ratified	2000	Ratified	2000
<b>Yemen</b>	1986	Signed	1996	Ratified	2000

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Treaty Collection, [http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtmsg\\_no=XXVI-3&chapter=26&lang=en](http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtmsg_no=XXVI-3&chapter=26&lang=en)

<sup>2</sup> Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization. <http://www.ctbto.org/the-treaty/status-of-signature-and-ratification/?Fsize=egwlennpvwxmbft>

<sup>3</sup> Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, <http://www.opcw.org/about-opcw/member-states/>

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