

Forum: Disarmament and International Security Committee (GA1)

Issue: Preventing the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) in the Middle East

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Introduction

Clearing the Middle East from Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) is considered to be one of the most significant goals of nonproliferation diplomacy. The history of the region with immense conflict between the nations has made the issue of disarmament an ongoing discussion since the 1960s.

The fragile diplomatic situation in the Middle East, from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to Syria and Yemen's civil wars, and the recent uprising in Iran, makes the issue of the use of weapons of mass destruction much more vital and urgent. In Syria, both the Assad regime and rebel groups target civilians with chemical weapons and conventional arms, whereas Israel's attacks against Palestine utilise WMDs often.

Definition of Key Terms

Non-proliferation: "Non-proliferation refers to all efforts to prevent proliferation from occurring, or should it occur, to reverse it by any other means than the use of military force. Non-proliferation applies to both weapons of mass destruction (including nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons) and conventional capabilities such as missiles and small arms." (North Atlantic Treaty Organization).

Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZs): NWFZs are regional approaches backed by the UN to strengthen global non-proliferation. According to the UN General Assembly, a NWFZ is the total absence of nuclear weapons within a zone of concern to an international system that guarantees compliance to the obligations (UN Office for Disarmament Affairs).

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs): According to the UN General Assembly, WMDs are defined as "atomic explosive weapons, radioactive material weapons, lethal chemical and biological weapons, and any weapons developed in the future which might have characteristics comparable in destructive effect to those of the atomic bomb or other weapons mentioned above." (UN Office for Disarmament Affairs).

General Overview

The plan to disarm the Middle East, or at least create a nuclear-free zone, has been discussed since April 1962, when an Israeli group called the Committee for the Denuclearization of the Middle East urged this idea. Beginning in 1974, countries such as Iran and Egypt also accepted a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East as their national policy, and the issue was discussed in the United Nations General Assembly. While many states and powerholders alike agree that it is in the best of the interests of all involved to cease the use of WMDs in the region, a conclusive decision and plan of action is yet to be reached.

The idea of securing a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East was enlarged with the inclusion of all WMDs in 1990, by the initiative of Egypt. This approach aimed to persuade Israel to abandon their nuclear weapons programme in exchange of countries in the region yielding chemical and biological weapons, and accepting the frameworks proposed by UN conventions.

While the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) serves as the overarching concept over the disarmament of the Middle East, the treaty's imposition in the region has remained limited, as key actors such as Israel, India, and Pakistan remain non-party to the NPT. For this purpose, in 1995, the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Review and Extension Conference brought global attention on the NPT and its implementation of this key region.

Historical events in the Middle East region has shaped the application and depth of the NPT, as well as the use of other WMDs. The Arab Spring, for instance, created a significant impact on the perception of security and disarmament. The increasing prioritization of public opinion and democracy motivates disarmament supporters across the nations. The rise of tension between the states of the region has also caused an intensive focus on the development of WMD programmes of regional powers.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran is party to the NPT, however has been accused with nuclear ambitions in the scenes of international diplomacy. Therefore, in 2015, Iran decided to restrict its nuclear programme with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which reaffirmed its promise to “under no circumstances ... ever seek, develop or acquire any nuclear weapons.” However, the agreement has become void following the withdrawal of the United States and the recent developments in the region.

Israel and the United States' has conducted air attacks against Iran's nuclear facilities since late 2025, whereas the affiliated individuals with the nuclear program have been targeted by assassinations. It had been considered likely that Iran will rebuild the nuclear sources that have been damaged by the said attacks. The nation also supplies missiles to other relevant powers in the region such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

The situation escalated in February 2026, when the United States and Israel conducted joint attacks against Iran's nuclear programme. The attacks followed negotiations regarding nuclear and ballistic missile programs, following the Twelve Day War in June 2025. During the air strikes on the 28th of February, Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran was killed. Donald Trump, the President

of the United States, has identified the cause of the attacks as ensuring Iran does not obtain a nuclear weapon. Iran has retaliated with attacks on foreign military bases in countries such as Iraq, Cyprus, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Oman, Lebanon, Qatar, and Kuwait.

Israel

Israel has possessed nuclear weapons since the 1960s, however their policy has led to a lack of official confirmation regarding the weapon programme. Israel is not a party to the NPT, and has opposed the diplomatic efforts to establish a WMDs Free Zone in the Middle East. Extensive chemical weapons programmes have been pursued since the 1950s, as well as missiles used in surface attacks to Iran and Palestine (Nuclear Threat Initiative).

The tension between Israel and Palestine, or more specifically, the current war between Israel and Palestine's ruling Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas, has highlighted the headlines throughout the past years. On 7th October 2023, Hamas organized an unprecedented attack on Israel, which escalated the conflict to an active battle site and killed about 1,200 people while taking 200 hostages. Israel responded with air strikes and a ground forces mission, with a death toll of 21,000 in Palestine. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented his decisiveness in the ongoing mission of the Israeli Defense Forces by stating their "clear goal of destroying Hamas's military and governing capabilities". After a temporary truce in November facilitated by Qatar, Israeli forces started to expand into refugee camps in Gaza. Israel also announced certain parts of Gaza to be cleared, which were later respondents of air strikes.

Syria

Large-scale chemical weapons in the conflict in Syria have been of concern in the Middle East. Even though Syria is party to the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993, increased noncompliance has been discussed by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and UN. Both Assad and rebel groups targeted civilians throughout the civil war, deploying chemical weapons and conventional arms. Since 2011, the conflict in Syria has caused immense amounts of civilian distress, with over 10 million displaced either internally or internationally. Those remaining in Syria faced an economic crisis brought by international sanctions, with over 90% of the population living under poverty.

While post-World War II disarmament efforts generally focus on nuclear weapons, the OPCW's specific focus allowed for it to recognize mass destruction by chemical weapons. Syria became a party to the convention and a Member State of the OPCW in 2013. The Syrian government cooperated with the OPCW and UN's mission to remove and destroy all declared chemical weapons. The SC previously held special missions in cooperation with the OPCW to find non-compliant actors that used chemical weapons in the territory.

December 2024 saw the backfall of Assad, as the leading rebel force Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) liberated Damascus. Thus, the Syrian civil war came to an end. However, as the UN Special Envoy to Syria has stated, the conflict cannot be declared fully over yet. Clashes between Turkish and Kurdish fighters in the Syrian border before a ceasefire was accomplished created concern regarding the escalation of violence in the region. Latest reports of the OPCW following the Assad regime's fall out in December 2024 suggest that more than a hundred chemical weapon facilities remain in the

area. The HTS regime has expressed their disapproval of the use of chemical weapons by the prior government, and has been committed to being more transparent and open regarding the chemical weapon facilities toward international organizations, OPCW alike.

Timeline of Events

15 May 1948	The UK mandate comes to an end and Israel declares its independence. The first Arab-Israeli War breaks out with the invasion by Egypt, Transjordan (Jordan), Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.
29 October 1956	The Suez Crisis occurs.
26 March 1962	The Committee for the Denuclearization of the Middle East urges for a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.
5-10 June 1967	The Six-Day War occurs with Israel occupying the West Bank, Gaza, Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem.
5 March 1970	The NPT enters into force.
6-25 October 1973	The Yom Kippur War breaks out between Syria-Egypt and Israel, over the Golan Heights territory.
21 August 1974	Iran and Egypt co-sponsor a resolution that calls for a WMD-free zone.
26 March 1975	The BWC enters into force.
31 May 1976	Syria intervenes in the Lebanese civil war.
14 December 1981	Israel formally annexes the Golan Heights territory.
8 December 1987	First Intifada in Israel.
April-May 1995	The NPT Review and Extension Conference is held to extend the mandate of the treaty indefinitely.
10 September 1996	The CTBT is adopted by the UN General Assembly.
29 April 1997	The CWC enters into force

28 September 2000	Second Intifada in Israel.
15 March 2011	The Syrian Civil War begins with protests against the Assad regime.
2013-2014	The UN destroys chemical weapons stock of Syria, with the government's permission.
29 June 2014	The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) declares a caliphate, seizing territories in Syria and Iraq.
7 October 2023	Hamas attacks Israel.
8 December 2024	The Assad regime falls consequently to the liberation of Damascus by rebel groups.
29 January 2025	The HTS establishes an interim government in Syria, and calls for the dissolution of all armed groups, including itself.
13-25 June 2025	The Twelve-Day War occurs between Iran and Israel
28 February 2026	US and Israel joint mission attacks Iran, leading to a crises involving 13 countries and distinct non-state armed groups such as Hamas, Houthis, and Hezbollah

Relevant UN Documents

- [Report of the Disarmament Commission, 6 May 1996, \(A/54/42\)](#)
- [Security Council Resolution 1540, 28 April 2004, \(S/RES/1540\)](#)
- [Security Council Resolution 2118, 27 September 2013, \(S/RES/2118\)](#)
- [Security Council Resolution 2209, 6 March 2015, \(S/RES/2209\)](#)
- [The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, Report of the Secretary-General, 2 October 2017, \(A/72/340\)](#)
- [Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East, Report of the Secretary-General, 12 July 2022, \(A/77/153\)](#)
- [Comprehensive study of the question of nuclear-weapon-free zones in all its aspects, 24 December 2024, \(A/79/241\)](#)
- [Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East, 7 December 2022, \(A/77/28\)](#)

Treaties and Events

- [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons \(NPT\), 5 March 1970](#)

- Israel is one of the 4 UN states that are not a party to the treaty.
- [*Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological \(Biological\) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction \(Biological Weapons Convention-BWC\), 26 March 1975:*](#)
 - Syria is a signatory but has not ratified the treaty, Israel has neither signed nor ratified.
- [*Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty \(CTBT\), 10 September 1996*](#)
 - The treaty is not in force due to a lack of ratifications. United States, Iran and Israel are signatories but have not ratified the treaty.
- [*The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction \(Chemical Weapons Convention-CWC\), 29 April 1997:*](#)
 - Israel is one of the 4 UN states that are not a party to the treaty.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

UN missions into determining the nuclear and WMD capabilities of the Middle Eastern powers has been channeled through regional initiatives, such as the commissions of inquiry into Syria and Iraq.

The UN and Permanent 5 countries' support into a WMD-free zone has always been prevalent, however, was solidified with the United States' announcement of a plan to mitigate the spread of WMDs across the region. **The Middle East Arms Control Initiative**, beginning in 1991, led to P5 meetings and the recognition of the need to comply with the UN Security Council, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Chemical Weapons Convention. After the discussions with the P5, the Arms Control and Regional Security in the Middle East (ACRS) was formed.

The working group mostly focuses on solutions such as confidence-building measures, military information exchange, and regional communication. However, it is important to note that such measures are only available as long as regional security is achieved. The current political climate and constant threat of conflict between said countries mostly characterizes a peaceful and diplomatic solution as impossible.

Possible Solutions

The day to day crisis in the region with shifting dynamics and new attacks announced every minute has made a solution in the region immensely important. The emergency UN Security Council meetings and US statements show that states have an inclination to resolve the issue diplomatically, however, the current situation bars a peace process due to the involvement of many state and non-state actors. The constant threat of war and civilian distress are of utmost importance to be resolved before WMDs can be eliminated from the region, noting the fact that the current attacks are directly caused by nuclear proliferation concerns.

A long-term plan can be established to ensure the implementation of the long-discussed WMD-free zone. Regional and national declarations of intent to withhold from deploying WMDs and new weapons programmes is the first step for such a plan, which can only be ensured by the ratification and compliance of the BWC, CWC, and NPT by all states in the region. Transparency regarding weapons programmes that would be required to establish a WMD-free zone can only be achieved once peace is prevalent between the nations, which requires conflict-mitigation by the UN. Targeted sanctions by the international community could ensure that the hostilities and physical conflict can come to an end in the region, however, does not seem to be a possibility in the near future due to the proxy power dynamics and the active involvement of third parties.

Organizations such as the IAEA and OPCW, as well as the binding power of the UN Security Council, carry the burden of ensuring compliance with international law and guidelines regarding the issue. A legally binding treaty among the powers is only possible through mediation and the creation of an awareness that it is beneficial for all parties to cease the use of WMDs. Even when a legal

ground has been established, compliance should be followed through with UN monitoring and clear enforcement mechanisms.

The states willing to join the said treaties should be aided financially and operationally in order to put into place disarmament and weapons-control measures as set by the OPCW and other relevant organizations. UN supervision is necessary to ensure that such programs are followed through without interception from third parties or terrorist organizations that wish to gain control of the weapons.

Non-state actors, such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and ISIS are also linked to the development of illicit weapons programmes, and are highly relevant to the current threat as Hezbollah continues to attack Israel after Khamanei's death. Counterterrorism methods are thus necessary to ensure that third-parties do not garner control over state weaponry. Through cooperation with the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism and the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre, national counter terrorism strategies in accordance with the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as well as regional frameworks can be developed.

One important consideration throughout this efforts should be Israel's consistent disclosure from weapons control conventions and treaties. Regional diplomatic initiatives, as well as the guidance of world powers is necessary to guide Middle East to a direction were each state is willing to disarm. Security assurances from global nuclear powers through bilateral or multilateral treaties and regional security pacts could prove useful to this extent.

Useful Links

At a time of crisis, it is important to get informed from a variety of sources with different political perspectives to comprehend the multifaceted representation of history. Sources listed below are starting points for further research into the current conflict and, at times, serve as opponent views.

[Al Jazeera Israel-Iran Conflict Live News and Updates](#)

[The Guardian Middle East Crisis Live](#)

[Wikipedia Page on 2026 Iran Conflict](#)

[Michael Rubin's Blog on Middle East Forum](#)

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