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**BACKGROUND GUIDE**

**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**AGENDA-**

 **DISCUSSION ON ESTABLISHMENT OF A NUCLEAR WEOPON FREE ZONE IN THE REGION OF THE MIDDLE EAST**

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Greetings delegates,

Hope you all are safe and at the best of health. We are very much excited to see you discuss a really interesting issue that is going on from such a long time. We Genz think differently than the people in the leadership and we have the capability of coming up with extraordinary ideas that can bedazzle the world and bring about the much awaited “change”. We hope that you all will research well and will look towards the learning outcome rather than winning some prize because knowledge is the most precious gift. Nuclear disarmament is topic that is going to be there until the future leaders of our generation won’t understand its importance and have a discussion upon it. We are extremely excited to see the young budding minds of your brainstorm and put forth some ideas that one day will lead to world peace. Looking forward to have a fruitful and a fun debate.

All the best

Regards-

The executive board

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East nuclear weapon free zone (MENWFZ) is a proposed agreement similar to other [nuclear-weapon-free zones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear-weapon-free_zone). Steps towards the establishment of such a zone began in the 1960s led to a joint declaration by Egypt and Iran in 1974 which resulted in a General Assembly resolution (broadened in 1990 through the Mubarak Initiative to cover all weapons of mass destruction).Following the [1995 NPT Review Conference](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_Non-Proliferation_Treaty/Treaty_text), the [International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Atomic_Energy_Agency) held a series of meetings involving experts and academics to consider ways to advance this process.

Such a zone would strengthen the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_Non-Proliferation_Treaty) (NPT), would help to promote global nuclear disarmament and would also help the [Middle East peace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_East_peace_process) as substantial confidence-building measures.As of 2014, three countries in the Middle East have been found in non-compliance with their IAEA safeguards obligations under the NPT: [Iraq](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_and_weapons_of_mass_destruction), [Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran_and_weapons_of_mass_destruction) and [Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria_and_weapons_of_mass_destruction). Of these cases, Syria remains unresolved.

While the immediate focus of international attention has been on stopping [Iran](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/iran) from obtaining the ability to build nuclear weapons, an equally worrisome development is that the Iranian drive to obtain a nuclear bomb has stimulated a regional race for nuclear technology to counter the perceived threat from a nuclear Iran.

Like [Iran](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/iran), at least 11 other Middle Eastern countries have either announced plans to explore atomic energy or have signed nuclear cooperation agreements: [Saudi Arabia](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/saudi-arabia), [Algeria](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/algeria-table-of-contents), [Egypt](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/egypt), [UAE](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/united-arab-emirates), [Jordan](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jordan), [Morocco](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/morocco), [Tunisia](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tunisia), [Turkey](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-virtual-jewish-history-tour-turkey), [Kuwait](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/kuwait), [Qatar](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/qatar), and [Oman](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/oman) ([Yemen](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/yemen) and [Libya](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/libya) cancelled their nuclear programs and [Syria’s](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/syria-military-threat-to-israel) was destroyed by [Israel](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel)).  Each of these countries, like Iran as well, have explicitly stated that they are only interested in peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

The fear is now that these countries may follow the Iranian example and work toward building a nuclear bomb to protect themselves in any future nuclear arms race.

As [President Obama](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/barack-obama-administration) noted in March 2012, "\“It will not be tolerable to a number of states in that region for Iran to have a nuclear weapon and them not to have a nuclear weapon ... so the threat of proliferation becomes that much more severe ... The dangers of an Iran getting nuclear weapons that then leads to a free-for-all in the Middle East is something that I think would be very dangerous for the world.”

These [Middle East nations](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-arab-muslim-world) are increasingly apprehensive about the [threat of a nuclear Iran](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-threat-from-iran) and the failure of the international community to take decisive actions to prevent [Tehran](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tehran) from achieving its nuclear ambitions. If the West is going to protect its interests in the region and prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, it is vital now that [Iran](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/iran) be stopped so steps can be taken to rein in these new efforts to join the nuclear club.

Developments in Nuclear Proliferation:

(Listed in Chronological Order by Country)

## Algeria

* In **January 2007**, Algeria and Russia signed an agreement to investigate the establishment of a nuclear power facility.
* In **June 2007**, Algeria signed a nuclear cooperation accord with the USA to begin generating nuclear energy for civilian purposes.
* During **2008**, Algeria signed other nuclear technology agreements with [Argentina](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-virtual-jewish-history-tour-argentina), [China](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-virtual-jewish-history-tour-china), and [France](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/table-of-contents-france).
* In **February 2009**, the government announced that it planned to build its first nuclear power plant to be operating about 2020.
* [Algeria](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/algeria-table-of-contents) has one of the most advanced nuclear-science programs in the Arab world and is considering the role that nuclear power might play in its domestic energy mix.
* In **2013,** This operational goal for a nuclear power plant was pushed back to 2025.  A Nuclear Engineering Institute was established in Algeria to provide safety training and education for future workers in the nuclear sector.
* In **September 2014,** Algerian and Russian officials signed an agreement to cooperate in peaceful uses of nuclear energy.  This agreement provides for the design, construction, operation and servicing of nuclear power plants and reactors in Algeria as well as collaboration in researching nuclear power for the uses of agriculture, biology, soil science, seawater desalination, and medicine.

## Egypt

* In **September 2006**, [Egypt](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/egypt) announced it would revive long dormant plans to construct a nuclear enegry.
* In **March 2007**, Energy and Electricity Minister Hassan Younis announced plans to construct 10 nuclear-powered "electricity-generating stations" across the country.
* [Russia](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-virtual-jewish-history-tour-russia-and-the-former-soviet-union) and Egypt signed a nuclear cooperation accord in March 2008.
* In **2009**, the Egyptian Nuclear Power Plant Authority (NPAA) and WorleyParsons Limited concluded a $160 million contract with services to include "site and technology selection studies and carries through to design, construction management, commissioning and start-up of the 1,200 MWe nuclear power plant."
* In **2010**, Cairo formally requested nuclear energy training assistance from the Korea International Cooperation Agency
* As of **June 2011,** Egypt's transitional government was planning to invite international companies to bid for their reactor construction project at El-Dabaa.
* In **April 2013,** Egypt withdrew from the sessions of the preparatory committee for the 2015 Review Conference to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in Geneva stating unsatisfaction with dealing with the seriousness of the issue in the Middle East.
* In **November 2013,** Interim Egyptian President Mansour announced the re-launch of Egypt's nuclear power program.  The plant will be constructed in El-Dabaa and residents were once again displaced from their homes there for the plant to be built.  The Egyptian government compensated these individuals with money and new land elsewhere.  Construction on this new plant is slated to begin in 2016 at the earliest.
* While Russian President Vladimir Putin was visiting Egypt in **February 2015**, Egypt and Russia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Russia to assist in building the first nuclear plant in the Egyptian city of El-Dabaa.  During a press conference featuring both leaders, Egyptian President al Sisi stressed the importance of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
* Egyptian President El-Sisi visited Russia in **August 2015**, where he met with Vladimir Putin. The two announced plans for Russia to build two nuclear power stations in Egypt.
* Officials from Moscow and Cairo signed an agreement on **November 19, 2015**, for [Russia](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/russia-virtual-jewish-history-tour) to build a nuclear power plant in [Egypt](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/egypt-virtual-jewish-history-tour), expected to be completed by 2022. The Russians are expected to build a “third generation” plant with four nuclear reactors in El-Dabaa, Egypt. Also in 2015, Egypt signed an agreement with China to enhance nuclear cooperation.
* In **December 2017**, Russia signed an agreement to build four light-water reactors for electricity production at El-Dabaa and a storage depot to hold spent nuclear fuel before it is sent to Russia for reprocessing. Russia will also build factories in Egypt for the domestic manufacture of nuclear plant components. The reactors have “no direct implications for the development of nuclear weapons,” according to Raphael Ofek but will “legitimize any future attempt by Egypt to build a uranium-enrichment or nuclear-fuel-reprocessing facility.”

## Iraq

* Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari requested help from nuclear countries to build an atomic reactor for peaceful nuclear power purposes at the **September 2017** meeting of the United Nations.  Previous Iraqi efforts to build a nuclear reactor facility were dashed with an Israeli airstrike in 1981.

Jordan

* In **January 2007**, Jordanian King Abdullah announced in an interview with *Haaretz* that Jordan was interested in acquiring nuclear power for peaceful and energy purposes.
* In **August 2007**, [Jordan](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jordan) established its Committee for Nuclear Strategy and set out a program for the development of nuclear power.
* In mid **2008**, Jordan signed an agreement with the Atomic Energy of Canada to conduct a study on building a reactor using natural uranium fuel for power.
* In **December 2008**, Jordan signed an MOU with Korea Electric Power Corp to carry out site selection and feasibility study on nuclear power projects.
* In **November 2009**, Jordan signed an $11.3 million agreement with WorleyParsons for the pre-construction phase of a 1000 MWe nuclear power plant.
* In **February 2011**, Jordan and Turkey signed a nuclear cooperation agreement.
* In **2012**, Jordan announced plans to start building a nuclear power plant in 2013 for operation by 2020 and a second one for operation by 2025.
* Jordan signed nuclear cooperation agreements with France, Canada, UK and Russia, in respect to both power and desalination.
* Jordan signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with China, covering uranium mining and nuclear power.
* Jordan also has cooperation agreements with South Korea, Japan, Spain, Italy, Romania, Turkey and Argentina related to infrastructure for nuclear power.
* In **October 2013,** Jordanian officials signed an agreement with Russia's nuclear power agency Rosatom for them to supply Jordan with two AES-92 nuclear reactor units.  Under the agreement Rosatom's subsidiary Rusatom Overseas will operate the plant. It was also announced that Russia will be paying 49.1% of the cost of the plant, with the Jordanian government picking up the remaining 50.1% of the cost.
* In **May 2014,** Jordanian Uranium Mining Company (JUMCO) announced plans to build a $140 million uranium mill in central Jordan near Amman.
* In **August 2014,** The IAEA's Integrated Nuclear Infrastructure Review team produced a favorable report after reviewing Jordan's preparations for nuclear power.
* In **September 2014,** Jordan signed a project development agreement with Rusatom Overseas and they hope to have a finalized construction contract by 2016.
* In **March 2015,** Jordan signed a $10 million agreement with Russia's nuclear agency Rusatom, with plans to build a massive 2-reactor nuclear plant at Amra by 2022. The deal with Rusatom provides for a feasibility study, site evaluation process and an environmental impact assessment.
* In **November 2018**, Jordan told an IAEA ministerial conference that it was working on two parallel projects of a single nuclear reactor.
* The kingdom is also interested in an agreement with the United States, but the [Trump administration](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/donald-trump-administration) wants Jordan to emulate UAE and rule out uranium enrichment.

Kuwait

* In **March 2009**, [Kuwait](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/kuwait) setup a national nuclear energy commission, in cooperation with the IAEA, to consider the development of a nuclear technology program.
* In **April 2010**, it signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with France relating civil nuclear energy applications, including electricity generation, water desalination, research, agronomy, biology, earth sciences and medicine.
* In **September 2010**, announced intention to build 4 nuclear power reactors by 2022 but this plan was scrapped in mid-2011.
* In **June 2010**, Kuwait signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the U.S. Government on nuclear safeguards and other nonproliferation topics.
* By **December 2010**, Kuwait had nuclear cooperation agreements with USA, Russia and Japan.

Morocco

* In **2007**, nuclear power company Areva signed an agreement with Morocco's Office Cherifien des Phosphates (OCP) to recover uranium from phosphoric acid.
* In **October 2007**, [Morocco](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/morocco) signed a nuclear energy cooperation agreement with France to develop a nuclear power plant near Marrakesh.
* In **January 2010**, government announced plans for two nuclear reactors to start operation after 2020.
* In **January 2011**, the government approved plans to set up a nuclear safety agency and draft a law on nuclear security.

Oman

* In **June 2009**, [Oman](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/oman) signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia.
* In **February 2010**, a delegation of U.S. experts met with Oman's Nuclear Steering Committee regarding areas of potential future cooperation in nuclear technology.

Pakistan

* The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Stimson Center released a report in August 2015, showing that Pakistan was quickly ramping up their nuclear arsenal and may be building up to 20 nuclear warheads per year. The report concluded that Pakistan would likely have the world's third largest nuclear arsenal by 2020, estimating that they are going to have at least 350 nuclear warheads.
* Pakistan test-fired a new ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead on **December 15, 2015**. The Shaheen 1A has a 900km range, and can deliver various types of warheads.

Qatar

* [Qatar](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/qatar) was actively involved in the GCC decision of **December 2006** to pursue nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.
* In **April 2008**, Qatar announced a plan to build a nuclear plant.
* In **May 2008**, Qatar sent experts to a meeting of the IAEA in [Vienna](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/vienna-austria-jewish-history-tour).
* In **2010**, Qatar raised the possibility of a regional project for nuclear generation.

Saudi Arabia

* In **May 2008**, the U.S. and [Saudi Arabia](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/saudi-arabia) agreed to establish a nuclear cooperation relationship and Saudi Arabia joined the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).
* In **April 2009,** King Abdullah told US diplomat Dennis Ross, “If [Iran] get nuclear weapons, we will get nuclear weapons.”
* In **August 2009**, the Saudi minister of water and electricity announced that the kingdom was working on plans for its first nuclear power plant.
* In **July 2010**, Saudi Arabia and [France](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-virtual-jewish-history-tour-france) announced the signing of a nuclear cooperation pact in order to develop atomic energy.
* In **February 2011,** Saudi Arabia and France signed a bilateral cooperation agreement for the development of nuclear power.
* In **January 2012**, a senior official noted, “We cannot live in a situation where Iran has nuclear weapons and we don’t ... If Iran develops a nuclear weapon, that will be unacceptable to us and we will have to follow suit.”
* Prince Turki al-Faisal noted that if Iran develops a nuclear weapon, “[that] would compel Saudi Arabia…to pursue policies which could lead to untold and possibly dramatic consequences”.
* In **January 2012,** King Abdullah signed an agreement with China for cooperation in the development and use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes.
* In **February 2012**, the London Times quoted a “senior Saudi official” as saying that Riyadh would launch a “twin-track nuclear weapons program” should [Tehran](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tehran) realize its ambition of obtaining a nuclear weapon.
* In **September 2013,** GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy and Toshiba/ Westinghouse signed agreements with the Exelon Nuclear Partners to pursue a reactor construction deal with  The King Abdullah City for Nuclear and Renewable Energy (KA-CARE).
* In **November 2013**, multiple sources told BBC News that the Saudi government had invested in Pakistani nuclear weapons projects and could obtain atomic bombs at will and might be able to deploy such devices more quickly than even Iran.
* In **May 2014,** The King Abdullah City for Nuclear and Renewable Energy (KA-CARE) started work with the Finnish Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority (STUK) to recruit and train workers for the plant, and establish safety standards.
* Saudi Arabia signed a secretive nuclear cooperation agreement with North Korea in **March 2015**.
* Saudi officials called to match Iran's nuclear ambitions in **May 2015**, “We prefer a region without nuclear weapons. But if Iran does it, nothing can prevent us from doing it too, not even the international community.”
* In **May 2015,** senior American officials revealed that Saudi Arabia had struck a deal with [Pakistan](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/pakistan-virtual-jewish-history-tour) for the purchase of nuclear weapons.
* Saudi Arabia signed an agreement with Russia in **June 2015** to cooperate on nuclear energy development.
* In **July 2015**, Saudi Arabia announced their intention to develop a “military nuclear program” within a decade.
* **May 2016**: Prince Turki al-Faisal, former Saudi Intelligence Chief, states that “all options” would be on the table if Iran takes steps towards developing a nuclear bomb, “including the acquisition of nuclear weapons to face whatever eventually might come from Iran.”
* In an interview with CBS This Morning in **March 2018**, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman says “Saudi Arabia does not want to acquire any nuclear bomb, but without a doubt if Iran developed a nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible.”
* In **May 2018**, following President Trump's decision to abandon the Iranian Nuclear Accord, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir tells CNN “We have made it very clear that if Iran acquires a nuclear capability we will do everything we can to do the same.”
* In **August 2020**, the *Wall Street Journal* reported Saudi Arabia has constructed an undisclosed facility with Chinese help for extracting uranium yellowcake from uranium ore which is one indication Riyadh is keeping open the option of developing nuclear weapons.

Syria

* From **2001-2007**, [Syria](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/syria) is believed to have been building a gas-cooled reactor similar to the plutonium production unit at Yongbyong in North Korea (this plant was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in 2007 and all remains were subsequently demolished by the Syrian government).
* In **2011**, the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission published a proposal for a new nuclear power plant by 2020.

## Tunisia

* In **December 2006**, [Tunisia](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tunisia) signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with France focused on nuclear power and desalination.
* In **April 2008**, the nuclear cooperation agreement with France was amplified to include the possible construction of a nuclear power plant.
*

Turkey

* Early in **2006**, the port city of Sinop was chosen to host a commercial nuclear power plant.
* In **August 2006**, [Turkey](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-virtual-jewish-history-tour-turkey) announced plans to have three nuclear power plants total operating by 2015. Discussions had been under way with Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd regarding two units as an initial investment.
* In **2007**, a bill concerning construction and operation of nuclear power plants and sale of their electricity was passed by parliament and subsequently approved by the President. The bill provided for the Turkish Atomic Energy Authority (TAEK) to set the criteria for building and operating the plants.
* In **February 2008,** prepatory work began to build a second nuclear power plant in Sinop.
* In **May 2008**, a civil nuclear cooperation agreement with the USA entered into force.
* In **May 2010**, Russia and Turkey signed an intergovernmental agreement for to build and operate a nuclear plant with four reactors in Akkuyu.
* In **June 2010**, a nuclear cooperation agreement with South Korea was signed to build the second Sinop plant with four nuclear reactors.
* In **2011**, the government announced intentions for three further nuclear power plants with four reactors each, all to be operational by 2030.
* In **March 2012**, a Turkish public opinion survey found a majority of 54% supporting policies that would lead Turkey to develop their own nuclear weapons.
* In **January 2013**, Turkish President Abdullah Gul called for a comprehensive solution to Iran's nuclear program and said Turkey does not want to see any neighboring country possess nuclear weapons. “Turkey will not accept a neighboring country possessing weapons not possessed by Turkey herself,” Gul said.
* In **November 2013,** The IAEA conducted an Integrated Nuclear Infrastructure Review and concluded that Turkey had taken appropriate steps in preparation for a new nuclear power program.
* The country's first nuclear power plant, at Akkuyu, commenced construction in **April 2018**. A Franco-Japanese consortium was expected to build the second nuclear plant, at Sinop. China is in line to build the third plant.
* Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on **September 5, 2019**, it was unacceptable for nuclear-armed states to forbid Ankara from obtaining its own nuclear weapons.

UAE

* In **January 2008**, [UAE](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/united-arab-emirates) signed a deal with a French company to build two nuclear reactors.
* UAE signed a nuclear framework agreement with [France](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-virtual-jewish-history-tour-france) for cooperation in the use of nuclear energy for peaceful, civilian purposes.
* UAE and U.S. signed an agreement in **April 2008** to establish peaceful nuclear energy cooperation and formalized that MOU in **January 2009**.
* In **May 2009**, President Obama approved the agreement on nuclear energy cooperation.
* The agreement with the U.S. follows the public launch of a UAE policy document outlining potential development of a domestic nuclear power plant.
* In **August 2009**, UAE joined he IAEA Convention on Nuclear Safety and the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management.
* In **May 2010**, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, the UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs, said they were developing nuclear technology in a "transparent, safe, secure, and peaceful" manner and outlined the UAE's policy to "develop its nuclear energy programme in a responsible manner".
* In **March 2011**, the UAE accepted a $20 billion bid from a South Korean consortium to build four commercial nuclear power reactors, total 5.6 GWe, by 2020.
* In **June 2011**, a national opinion poll found strong support for nuclear technology development with 85% of respondents believing in the importance of nuclear energy.
* In **July 2012**, UAE began building a maiden nuclear power plant and signed an agreement with [Australia](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/australia-virtual-jewish-history-tour) for the supply of uranium.
* In **March 2013,** ENEC submitted a 10,000 page construction license application for the third and fourth nuclear reactor units, these licenses were approved and issued in September 2014
* In **October 2014,** Construction began on the third nuclear power plant.
* In **December 2014,** Construction on the first of four nuclear power plants in Abu Dhabi is on schedule at 61% completion.  They expect the first plant to be providing nuclear energy to the city in 2017.
* In **March 2015,** the UAE submitted their first nuclear operating license application.
* In **2017**, the UAE said it aimed to obtain half its energy from nuclear power and renewables by 2050.
* In **July 2020**, the UAE became the first Arab country to open a nuclear power plant. Once its four units are operational, the plant is expected to provide a quarter of the country’s electricity. “The UAE’s investment in these four nuclear reactors risks further destabilizing the volatile Gulf region, damaging the environment and raising the possibility of nuclear proliferation,” according to Paul Dorfman, a researcher at University College London’s Energy Institute.

IRAN

## Developing a Nuclear Bomb

In 1990, [China](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-virtual-jewish-history-tour-china) signed a 10-year nuclear cooperation agreement that allowed Iranian nuclear engineers to obtain training in China. In addition, China had already built a nuclear research reactor in Iran that became operational in 1994.

Israel first received reports about an Iranian nuclear program in May 1992 and Prime Minister [Yitzhak Rabin](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/yitzhak-rabin-2) tried to warn the [Clinton Administration](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/william-quot-bill-quot-clinton-administration). The CIA, however, maintained that the Iranian program was civilian rather than military, an assessment the agency did not abandon until 1998(*New Republic*, February 5, 2007).

In 2003, a man went to visit Olli Heinomen at the [International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/international-atomic-energy-agency-iaea) headquarters in Vienna. Heinomen won't reveal his source, but said that the man told him that Iran was building a replica of its existing uranium-enrichment site near the city of Qom. The informant also said Iran was replicating its heavy-water plant in Arak, which is capable of producing plutonium. The first claim was verified, but the second has not been -- yet. Heinomen also said that as early as 1993-94, the IAEA had learned that China had secretly sent two tons of uranium to Iran and that inspectors found suspicious laboratories, but still said everything was okay. The agency, he said, said nothing for three years (*Wall Street Journal*, March 2-3, 2013).

By 2003 the CIA had few doubts about Iran’s activities: "The United States remains convinced that Tehran has been pursuing a clandestine nuclear weapons program, in contradiction to its obligations as a party to the [Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/signatories-to-the-treaty-on-the-non-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons-npt) During 2003, Iran continued to pursue an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle ostensibly for civilian purposes but with clear weapons potential.”

The reference to [Iran](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/iran) having a civilian nuclear program refers to the nuclear power plant at [Bushehr](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/iran-s-main-nuclear-facilities#bush). Construction of the plant was started in 1975 by German companies, but abandoned following the Islamic revolution in 1979. Iran subsequently signed a contract in 1995 with Russia to complete the plant. Financial wrangling between the Russians and Iranians delayed completion of the project, which was expected to be finished in 2006. Russia informed Tehran in early 2007 that it would withhold nuclear fuel for Bushehr unless Iran suspended its uranium enrichment **(**[New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/20/world/europe/20iran.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)**, March 20, 2007)**, but reversed its position a few months later and delivered the long-delayed first shipment of nuclear fuel. Still, other delays prevented the plant from coming online until 2011.

The Russian decision came after the release of a U.S. intelligence report that concluded Tehran had stopped its nuclear weapons program in late 2003. President [George W. Bush](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/george-w-bush-administration) said, "If the Iranians accept that uranium for a civilian nuclear power plant, then there’s no need for them to learn how to enrich." But a senior Iranian official said his country would under no circumstances halt its efforts to enrich uranium ([Reuters](http://www.gulfinthemedia.com/index.php?id=366641&news_type=Top&lang=en), December 18, 2007 ).

The CIA saw the Bushehr project differently:

Iran continues to use its civilian nuclear energy program to justify its efforts to establish domestically or otherwise acquire the entire nuclear fuel cycle. Iran claims that this fuel cycle would be used to produce fuel for nuclear power reactors, such as the 1,000-megawatt light-water reactor that Russia is continuing to build at the southern port city of Bushehr. However, Iran does not need to produce its own fuel for this reactor because Russia has pledged to provide the fuel throughout the operating lifetime of the reactor and is negotiating with Iran to take back the irradiated spent fuel.

The Bushehr project provided valuable training to Iranian technicians and engineers, and expanded the regime's nuclear infrastructure. To allay U.S. fears that the fuel Russia is providing for the plant could be diverted to a weapons program, the Russians agreed to take back the spent fuel rods from the plant, but Iran would not agree to this

Iran's Secret Plants

In 2002, two previously unknown nuclear facilities were discovered in Iran by a delegation of the IAEA lead by [Mohamed El-Baradei](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/egyptian-presidential-elections-mohamed-elbaradei). One in Arak produces heavy water, which could be used to produce weapons. The other plant is in Natanz.

Also in 2002, Iran revealed that it had purchased special gas from China that could be used to enrich uranium for the production of nuclear weapons. The gas purchase was supposed to be reported to the IAEA, but it was concealed instead. Chinese experts have also been involved in the supervision of the installation of centrifuge equipment that can be used to enrich uranium.

In February 2003, Iranian President [Mohammad Khatami](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/mohammad-khatami) announced the discovery of uranium reserves near the central city of Yazd and said Iran was setting up production facilities “to make use of advanced nuclear technology for peaceful purposes” (AP, February 11, 2003). This was an alarming development because it suggested Iran was attempting to obtain the means to produce and process fuel itself, despite the Russia’s offer to provide all the uranium Iran required for civilian purposes.

The Iranian government, confronted in February 2004 with new evidence obtained from the secret network of nuclear suppliers surrounding Khan, acknowledged it had a design for a far more advanced high-speed centrifuge to enrich uranium than it previously revealed to the [IAEA](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/international-atomic-energy-agency-iaea). This type of centrifuge would allow Iran to produce nuclear fuel far more quickly than the equipment that it reluctantly revealed to the agency in 2003. This revelation proved that Iran lied when it claimed to have turned over all the documents relating to their enrichment program.

How to work towards a disarmament treaty

The creation of a weapons of mass destruction–free zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East remains a soft-discussed idea when considering steps toward a world free of nuclear weapons. Nowhere is such a zone needed more than in the Middle East. However, the notable absence of favorable conditions presents significant challenges in reaching this goal. In fact, no WMDFZ or nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) has ever been established among states at war, as has formally been the case between Israel and Syria since Israel’s creation in 1948. Nor has one ever been established between states that do not officially recognize the existence of a state in their region as a political entity and thus share no diplomatic relations, as is the case with many states in the region, including Iran, toward Israel.

The political circumstances that characterize the Middle East therefore render a WMDFZ unlikely in the foreseeable future. Insisting on the establishment of such a zone at once, without first implementing confidence-building measures, is not only unrealistic but counterproductive.

Most states in the Middle East have ratified both the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). Key holdouts include Israel (which has signed but not ratified the CWC and has not signed the BWC) and Egypt (which has not signed the CWC, and has signed but not ratified the BWC). Meanwhile, after using chemical weapons and coming under the threat of U.S. airstrikes, Syria ratified the CWC in October 2013. It has also signed but not ratified the BWC.

Even after all states in the region have ratified both treaties, more work will still be needed to verifiably eliminate biological and chemical weapons; the BWC lacks any verification provisions and there are compliance concerns related to the CWC, particularly with regard to Syria. These challenges notwithstanding, the greatest challenge to establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East is establishing a zone without nuclear weapons. As a first step in the right direction, the EU should play a constructive role by actively promoting the establishment of a nuclear-test-free zone in the region.

LET’S START WITH A NUCLEAR-TEST-FREE ZONE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

It is unrealistic to expect Israel to join the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon state anytime soon. But it is necessary to seek practical and balanced regional confidence-building measures. Since 2007, it is advocated that the first such measure should be to promote a nuclear-test-free zone (NTFZ) in the Middle East under an agreement committing Egypt, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Syria to ratify the CTBT in a coordinated way and within an agreed period of time.

The ratification of the CTBT by those five states would, de facto, establish a NTFZ in the Middle East since all other key countries in the region, including Turkey, have already ratified the CTBT.

A nuclear-test-free zone in the Middle East would represent the first concrete step in building nuclear confidence in the region and would be a win-win measure for all concerned. It would not single out any state, and thus would not give any state an incentive to block progress. Moreover, it could occur without waiting for the recognition of Israel by Iran and many Arab states and the conclusion of a peace treaty between Israel and Syria.

If any state in the region considered only an all-or-nothing approach and rejected limited confidence-building steps, such as the one proposed here, that would provide clear evidence that such a state is not serious about establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East and is in fact comfortable with the status quo.

RESEARCH LINKS -

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/07/07/realistic-approach-toward-middle-east-free-of-wmd-pub-64039>

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/nuclear-proliferation-in-the-middle-east>

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/iran-nuclear-history>

file:///Users/adi/Desktop/Despite%20Opposing%20Views%20on%20Middle%20East%20Nuclear-Weapon-Free%20Zone,%20First%20Committee%20Delegates%20Say%C2%A0‘We%20Ar.webarchive

http://fissilematerials.org/library/rr11.pdf