

Between Israel and Iran: Egypt and the 2010 NPT Review Conference

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The May 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference represented a milestone in Egypt's diplomatic activity on the Israeli nuclear issue. The final document passed at the conference calls for an international conference in 2012 to discuss ways of implementing the Middle East resolution passed at the Review and Extension Conference held in 1995.¹

The Israeli nuclear issue has been on Egypt's political-security agenda since 1960, the year international media reports emerged describing French assistance to Israel in establishing a nuclear reactor in Dimona.² Israel's efforts to achieve a nuclear military capability and its subsequent (according to Egypt) achievement of this capability are perceived as a multidimensional threat. There have been occasional statements voiced by Egypt's leadership concerning the imminent threat to Egypt and the Arab world posed by the existence of nuclear arms in Israel's hands. But ultimately, the direct threat to Egypt inherent in Israel's nuclear capability is less severe than Israel's superiority in the areas of science, technology, and economy. This major edge, epitomized by Israel's nuclear capability, exposes Egypt's inferiority and inability to remedy it. Moreover, beyond the tangible advantages involved, Israeli superiority constitutes a blow to Egypt's self-image. In Egypt's view, Israel attempted to exploit this superiority during the first half of the 1990s in order to challenge Egypt's regional leadership.

In the past there were failed efforts by Egypt to prevent Israel from receiving the assistance it needed to build its capability. The option of a

preventative military move by Egypt also never got past the declaratory stage.³ Therefore Egypt focused its efforts on the diplomatic sphere, in an attempt to fulfill its strategic goal of disarming Israel of its nuclear capability.⁴ The main focus of Egyptian activity is currently in the multilateral arena. Due to the balance of forces there – the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and UN institutions and their subsidiaries – Egypt enjoys a pronounced advantage over Israel.

Egypt's diplomatic struggle on the Israeli nuclear issue spans more than three decades⁵ and has been waged in the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly First Committee, the UN General Assembly, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the NPT Conference. Egypt initiated numerous motions and reports published at the IAEA and the UN as main tools towards the ostensible goal of establishing a nuclear and WMD free zone in the Middle East. However, Egypt presumably understands that this objective is unachievable, at least under existing circumstances. If so, then Egypt's major efforts are likely focused on keeping the issue alive in the international consciousness. The hope is that over time, it will garner sufficient support to generate international pressure that leaves Israel no choice but to join the NPT and thus, in fact, be disarmed of its nuclear weapons.

Even if over the years Egypt has gained international support for its position (with the decisive portion coming from the Arab-Islamic bloc and NAM – the so-called “automatic majority”), this has not changed Israel's position. A change could become possible if, among other developments, the US pressures Israel to embrace the principle of NPT universality and join the treaty – which in fact it has long called for. As long as this does not happen, Egypt's chances of fulfilling its objective are slim.

Until some eight years ago, when reports emerged concerning Iran's efforts to develop the ability to enrich uranium, Egypt's efforts were focused on finding a long term diplomatic solution to the Israeli nuclear issue. With Iran's intentions of achieving nuclear military capability increasingly clear, Egypt has faced a challenge ostensibly similar to the challenge of a nuclear Israel. In fact, however, in two principal ways it is an entirely different challenge: the nature of the threat it poses to Egypt and Egypt's ability to respond to it. If Iran takes action beyond enriching uranium and strides

towards achieving nuclear military capability, it threatens Egypt's standing in the Muslim and Arab worlds. This endeavor to change the regional status quo as a mean of achieving regional domination, particularly in the Gulf arena, constitutes a threat to Egypt's leadership in the region. To Egypt's way of thinking, it is liable to find itself forced to address a dual inferiority, versus Israel and versus Iran, based in part on those two countries' superior development in the scientific-technological sphere. Egypt would need to find a credible response to help it reclaim what it sees as Egypt's rightful place in the region. However, since Iran is an ally within the NAM framework and a partner in the struggle of non-nuclear states for their rights, it is difficult for Egypt to confront the Iranian threat and embrace the international activity against Tehran.

Similar to its dependence on the US vis-à-vis the Israeli case, Egypt must rely on the American effort to solve the Iranian crisis. Yet while a diplomatic solution that removes the Iranian nuclear military threat would lessen the urgency of finding a response, it would not preclude the need for an overall response (a need Egypt perceives given Iran's uranium enrichment abilities). On the other hand, a failure in the diplomatic effort would exacerbate the sense of urgency in seeking a response.

This article focuses on evaluating the efforts Egypt has invested in advancing its interests on the Israeli nuclear issue. Certainly the materializing Iranian threat has exacerbated the matter and presented Egypt with a complex dilemma. Egypt's ability to successfully contend with both the Israeli and Iranian challenges depends on the US, which on the issues of nuclear disarmament and weapons control and multilateral diplomacy has changed under the Obama administration. Was the US attempting to help Egypt deal with both of these challenges? The timeframe for studying these issues (mainly from the Israeli perspective) is not limited to the recent Review Conference, but includes the 1995 conference, which represented an opening chapter of sorts that reached a partial conclusion in 2010. Preceding both conferences was a series of relevant events that will be reviewed briefly.⁶

The 1995 NPT Review Conference

The first half of the 1990s saw significant Egyptian activity on the Israeli nuclear issue, and the NPT Conference in May 1995 represented a would-be end to this chapter.

In April 1990, President Mubarak called for the establishment of a weapons of mass destruction free zone in the Middle East. Two factors stood behind the timing of his initiative. First, there were reports of Saddam Hussein's plans to develop non-conventional weapons; second was the desire to divert attention from Egyptian-Iraqi cooperation in building a surface-to-surface missile (the "Condor").⁷ Although reaction to the initiative was lukewarm, Egypt was able to present it as a contribution to UN Security Council resolution 687 regarding Iraq's non-conventional capabilities. The initiative and the UN resolution were perceived by Egypt as helpful in advancing the handling of the Israeli nuclear issue.⁸

In May 1991, President Bush announced his Middle East arms control initiative.⁹ Aside from the initiative's conventional component (an attempt to formulate guidelines for arms exporters to refrain from destabilizing arms transfers to the region), it also addressed non-conventional weapons (nuclear, chemical, biological) and surface-to-surface missiles. In the nuclear context, the initiative called for verification of the prohibition against producing and supplying materials (uranium and plutonium) for the production of nuclear arms. Additionally, it called for countries that had not yet joined the NPT to do so and place their facilities under IAEA inspection, and it expressed support for the eventual establishment of a region free of nuclear arms. Egypt, which welcomed the plan, made it clear that Israel should be included in the implementation of the initiative regarding the need to report on the inventory of nuclear materials in its possession.¹⁰

Hoping to capitalize on the outcome of the Gulf War and set a series of processes in motion that would contribute to changing the Middle Eastern reality, the US administration convened the Madrid Conference in October 1991. The overarching goal was to end the conflict between Israel and its neighbors. In order to facilitate bilateral talks between Israel and respective parties, the US initiated multilateral talks to advance regional cooperation and enable Israel's regional integration. Five working teams were set up to address five issues; one of the groups dealt with arms control and regional

security (ACRS). The initiative to form this group, though not included in the original proposal, came from the US and was supported by Egypt, which at that point saw many advantages in handling a range of issues on a multilateral level.¹¹

In his speech at the opening of the multilateral talks in Moscow in January 1992, Egyptian foreign minister Amr Moussa made it clear that he expected the talks to deal also with the nuclear issue. Not long after, however, Egypt¹² understood that this would not occur within the framework of the working groups, and that the continuation of discussions (as well as the continuation of multilateral talks) would likely endanger Egypt's ability to shape the Arab agenda and as a result, threaten its regional leadership.¹³ Israel's interaction with other Arab participants punctured the exclusivity of Egypt's relationship with Israel, and the gradual process of normalization between Israel and the region's states proceeded without any price being exacted of Israel (in Egypt's mind, on the nuclear issue). These processes were perceived by Egypt as a threat, and from here, it was only a matter of time until the ACRS talks were ended (1995). Still, these talks, the first of their kind in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, clarified the differences between Egypt and Israel as to the content and timing of the objective that both embraced – establishment of a WMDFZ.¹⁴

The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which was opened for signature in Paris in 1993, granted Egypt an opportunity to regain its stature as inter-Arab leader and designer of the regional agenda, mainly by formulating a new-old initiative for a WMD free zone. Already before the meeting Egypt made it clear that as long as Israel did not join the NPT, Egypt would not sign the Chemical Weapons Convention. Ultimately Egypt was unable to maintain a uniform Arab line and a number of Arab countries acceded to US pressure and signed the convention.

Egyptian preparations for the NPT Review Conference included numerous statements to focus attention on the threat of a nuclear Israel to the security of Egypt and the Arab world. The statements,¹⁵ which were accompanied by extensive diplomatic activity, sparked tension in relations with Israel. Despite attempts by the sides to lower the charged atmosphere, this tension was inevitable in light of the increased pressure Egypt sought to exert prior to the conference. In the minds of many Egyptians, Egypt had missed the opportunity to extract any sort of gain when it signed the

peace treaty with Israel or when it ratified the NPT (both under Anwar Sadat). Therefore the conference seemed like a window of opportunity to try to anchor the Israel nuclear issue in the agenda in a way that would oblige future conferences to deal with the Israeli nuclear issue.

Egypt took advantage of the US intention to achieve a resolution to extend the NPT indefinitely. Accompanied by a group of Arab states, Egypt expressed its opposition to the indefinite extension of the treaty. When discussions were over, Egypt bowed to pressure and agreed to support the treaty's extension in exchange for the adoption of a resolution on the Middle East; this was passed without a vote.¹⁶ Among the contents of the resolution: adoption of the goals of the peace process and the efforts to advance it contributes to promoting a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and other WMD; countries that have not yet joined the NPT are called on to do so and assume international obligations not to purchase nuclear arms or fissile material; countries are called on to submit their nuclear activity to IAEA inspection; concern over the existence of unsupervised facilities in the Middle East; countries that possess such facilities are called on to place them under full IAEA inspection; emphasis on the importance of the early implementation of universal adherence to the NPT; and a call for practical steps in the appropriate forums to advance a WMDFZ in the Middle East. The parties were called on to avoid taking steps harmful to implementation of the NPT.

The resolution can be considered an achievement as far as Egypt is concerned. It was able to firmly insert the Israeli nuclear issue (without mention of Israel) into the summary document and thus transform the issue from an Egyptian-Arab pursuit to an international issue. The resolution assisted Egypt in its subsequent activity in the following fifteen years up to the 2010 conference, whereupon Egypt set itself the goal of bringing about the implementation of the resolution passed in 1995.

The 2010 Conference

The years before the 2010 conference saw activity by states such as North Korea, Libya, Iran, and Syria that challenged both the credibility of the NPT and its verification regime and the ability to deal with the danger of nuclear proliferation. Furthermore, the Bush administration's decision to

sign a cooperation agreement with India as well as an agreement on China-Pakistan cooperation was a further blow to the future of the NPT regime.¹⁷

Barack Obama's entry into the White House and the worldview he brought with him on a series of issues including disarmament and arms control stimulated expectations for change following an eight-year Bush administration. In his speech in Prague in April 2009, Obama detailed his strategy for confronting the nuclear threat, founded on America's commitment to a world without nuclear arms. The strategy he presented focused on three levels: steps to reduce nuclear arsenals; reinforcement of the NPT regime; and prevention of nuclear weapons proliferation, including prevention of nuclear weapons or materials falling into the hands of terrorists. Specifying steps he intended to take in order to actualize the strategy, Obama stressed his commitment to the cooperative strengthening of the NPT and to fulfillment by the US (together with the other nuclear states) of its obligation as defined by the treaty – taking measures to dismantle nuclear weapons in exchange for the non-purchase of nuclear arms by additional countries, while recognizing the right of any country to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.¹⁸

In 2009, Obama worked through a number of channels in order to advance his objective of a nuclear free world. He convened a special summit of the Security Council (March 2009) and endorsed Resolution 1887 on the prevention of the spread of nuclear weapons; there was a reevaluation of US nuclear policy (the Nuclear Posture Review), which emphasized the change in Obama's conception from his predecessor's regarding the nuclear issue; he convened the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington (April 2010), dedicated to the dangers of nuclear terror and the means of preventing it; and he conducted accelerated negotiations that led to the signing of the New START agreement with Russia prior to the summit. All these were types of confidence building measures that as far as Obama was concerned were intended to lay the foundations for the 2010 Review Conference. In preparatory discussions and statements preceding the conference, administration officials emphasized the commitment to implementation of the 1995 resolution pertaining to the Middle East. This position was an encouraging sign from Egypt's standpoint, and its delegates expressed their resentment that in the fifteen years since the adoption of the resolution, no progress had been made in its implementation.

Since 2006, a new Egyptian strategy has surfaced within the IAEA framework, where over the years Egypt had regularly raised two motions that were invariably tabled. In 2006, however, Egypt decided to remove a paragraph on the peace process from the resolution concerning the establishment of a region free of nuclear arms, while adding a call to Israel (hitherto not mentioned by name) to join the NPT. Attempting to spur other countries to support a resolution concerning the Israeli threat and capabilities, Egypt in 2008 omitted the word “threat.” The hope was that in this way it would be able to achieve a majority for an anti-Israel resolution. As such, Egypt was continuing its pattern of behavior since before the 1995 conference, i.e., sharpening and hardening the anti-Israeli line. This time, and for the first time, Egypt’s attempt concluded successfully.

During the Review Conference’s preparatory discussions, Egypt circulated a proposal to move from the declaratory stage to the implementation stage of the 1995 resolution.¹⁹ Egypt’s delegates made it clear that any final document from the conference that did not include operative steps on the resolution would not gain Egypt’s support. In other words, Egypt would not allow President Obama to realize his goal of concluding the conference with a final document if its demands were not accepted. And indeed, the final document achieved after a month of discussions refers to the Middle East resolution from the 1995 conference (and its reaffirmation at the 2000 Review Conference) and mentions Israel by name,²⁰ and stresses the importance of Israel joining the NPT and placing its nuclear facilities under IAEA inspection. Included in the resolution’s operative clauses is the plan for the UN secretary general and countries backing the 1995 resolution, in consultation with Middle East states, to convene a conference in 2012 where all the regional states would participate in a conference on the establishment of a nuclear weapons free zone and all other WMD-related issues. The secretary general and the countries backing the resolution would determine which government would host the conference in 2012.²¹ In addition, and in consultation with countries of the region, a facilitator would be appointed to work on preparations for convening the conference in 2012 and assist in implementation of the 1995 resolution. The facilitator would also assist in implementing steps decided on at the conference and report to the subsequent review conference and the elements preparing for it.

Egypt feared that Iran, which sought to divert attention from itself to a scathing settling of accounts with nuclear countries over their manner of conduct on disarmament issues, would torpedo any agreement that was achieved. In order to prevent Iran from doing so, Egypt recruited the assistance of several NAM countries that made it clear they would not support an effort to prevent achievement of a summary agreement. Having no choice, Iran gave in to the pressure and joined the consensus after it was promised its name would not be mentioned.

Thus even if the final version of the resolution did not meet all of Egypt's demands, the resolution, which contains operative steps for implementing the Middle East resolution passed in 1995, is a precedent, and as such, an Egyptian achievement. As in the 1995 conference, when Egypt exploited the procedural process (threatening to break the consensus and prevent an agreement over indefinite extension of the NPT) in order to extract a Middle East resolution from the US, in 2010 the Egyptian threat loomed in the air. The US administration's determination to bring the conference to a successful conclusion played into Egypt's hands. In order to obtain Egypt's agreement to the final agreement, the administration was ready to pay in Israeli currency²² and forego any mention of Iran. Thus the administration obtained a short term achievement whose ability to strengthen the NPT regime now or in the future, which was an underlying purpose, is doubtful.

Egypt-Iran

Egypt, like the rest of the countries in the region, is worried over Iran's drive to achieve nuclear military capability. Egyptian concerns presumably do not stem from fears over an Iranian attack on Egypt. Rather, they are due to the implications of Iran's nuclearization for its growing self-confidence, its status in the region, and the significance this would have on Egypt's stability and regional standing. These worries find no expression in official public statements by Egypt,²³ which instead express the following positions:

- a. Support for Iran's right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.
- b. Opposition to solving the crisis in non-peaceful ways.
- c. Support for the international effort to prevent Iran from achieving nuclear weapons.

- d. In tandem with the effort to advance the above objectives, the need to deal with the issue of Israel's nuclear capabilities and the double standard that exists, as Egypt sees it, in relation to Israel.
- e. The danger of proliferation must be dealt with within the framework of negotiations to establish a WMD free zone in the Middle East.

Testimony to Egypt's preference to advance the Israeli nuclear issue over the Iranian threat was evident at the last two conferences. At the NPT Conference in 2005, it was Egypt that defended Iran from pressure, and in 2010, once having reached agreement on advancing the Israeli nuclear issue, it was Egypt (together with the US) that was ready to forego the mention of Iran from the document. Does this detract from the severity of the Iranian threat? Not necessarily. One must assume that if mention of Iran's name had no connection with the risk of Israel's achievement, that Egypt would not oppose it. Is Egypt's conduct indicative of its sense of the severity of the Israeli threat? Not necessarily; however in contrast with the Iranian issue (being handled in the Security Council and led by the US and EU states), Egypt feels "ownership" in spearheading the Israeli nuclear issue at NPT conferences and at international forums in general.

These explanations concerning Egypt's low profile in the Iranian context do not lessen the significance of Egyptian concerns and weaknesses vis-à-vis Iran. What in Egypt's view is common to Iran and Israel²⁴ is not just that both are competing with Egypt over leadership and influence in the region; it is also their ability to build a nuclear infrastructure, which requires scientific-technological capability and as such exposes Egypt's inferiority and limitations. The difference between the Israeli and Iranian threats as far as Egypt is concerned is that Israel does not threaten the stability of the regime. Iran, on the other hand, is perceived by the Egyptian regime not only as a state competing for dominance in the region, but as a state striving to change the existing regional order. Fear of Iran's hegemonic aspirations in the Gulf and their realization are expressed by Gulf leaders. The fact these developments are taking place in a region of Egyptian influence exacerbates the challenge and the need to find a response.

These developments oblige Egypt, whose leadership is changing, to conduct a serious assessment of the situation and develop a strategy that provides a response to the challenge presented by Iran.

Conclusion: Confronting the Challenge

More than five decades ago Egypt included the Israeli nuclear issue on its agenda. Already in 1974, Egypt together with Iran placed the issue on the table of the General Assembly, under the cover of establishing a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East. The NPT Review Conferences in 1995 and 2010 constitute milestones in Egypt's path towards achievement of its objective: disarming Israel of its nuclear capability.²⁵ At the 1995 conference, Egypt was able to achieve a resolution focused on the Middle East and thus attach the Israeli nuclear issue to the agenda of future conferences. Fifteen years later, it was able to achieve a resolution that included practical steps for implementing that resolution.

In statements made at a preparatory meeting of the 2010 conference, an Egyptian delegate criticized the lack of progress in implementing the 1995 resolution. And indeed, the balance sheet of achievements after many years of intensive diplomatic activity is sufficiently meager. Egypt was unable to have Israel join the NPT, place its facilities under IAEA inspection, and report on the extent of its cooperation. Nor was Egypt able to obtain a report on the extent of Israeli nuclear activity and the inventory of nuclear material in Israel's possession. Moreover, beyond gaining support in principle for Egyptian initiatives to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMD (supported in principle by Israel), Egypt was not able to advance the implementation of the resolutions in any measurable way. The motions at the UN and the IAEA, meant to pressure Israel and thereby isolate it, also figure in this context. Even if Egypt did achieve several limited victories, they were unable to bring about a change in Israel's position or, alternatively, advance the issue uppermost in the mind of the Egyptian leadership. On a related note, as long as the Egyptian objective is not achieved, Israel's ambiguous nuclear policy serves the Egyptian interest. That position is liable to change in the event of the appearance of an additional nuclear state in the Middle East.

Does the resolution passed at the last conference constitute a turnaround in Egyptian efforts? Will the future conference actually take place; and if so, will it be a one-time event or perhaps create a mechanism to follow-up steps that have been decided on? One must assume that Egypt, armed with the resolution, will do all it can in the upcoming period to bring about the convening of the conference. Nonetheless, Egypt's success is to a large

extent dependent on the US. If not for US determination to fulfill its own objectives at the 1995 and 2010 conferences,²⁶ it is doubtful if Egypt could have reaped those achievements. Reservations by Obama and especially by his National Security Advisor following the 2010 conference, plus the preconditions (whose fulfillment in the near future is doubtful) for convening a 2012 conference, call such a conference into question. Moreover, amid the fluid realities of the Middle East and the international arena, until 2012 developments may take place that have implications on a US decision to support or reject convening the conference. At the same time, these reservations coexist with Obama's commitment to nuclear disarmament, his support for the universality of the NPT, the call for all countries to join the treaty, and his support for establishing a Middle East WMD free zone. If conditions do not allow the convening of the conference, Obama would find it difficult to prove his commitment to the decision.

At the end of the 2010 conference, Israel issued a statement in response to what it viewed as the flawed and hypocritical resolution passed at the conference. As a non-member of the NPT, Israel is not obliged to fulfill its resolutions. The statement went further and said that due to "the resolution's distorted nature Israel could not participate in its implementation." Since then, Israel has softened its stance and announced that the issue is under discussion. Indeed, now, divorced from the prevailing conditions in months prior to the Review Conference, Israel would do well to examine the advantages and disadvantages of participation or non-participation in preparations for the 2012 conference. The many important conditions and reservations expressed by Obama and his National Security Advisor permit Israel to confer with the American administration (and the sooner the better) in order to arrive at written understandings concerning content and procedures of a conference. In this way, if Israel should decide to participate, it would not imply any danger to its security interests.

On the plus side, Egypt can credit itself with an achievement that enabled it to place the Israeli nuclear issue on the international agenda. Still, there are parties in Egypt that understand that Egypt's ability to fulfill its objective under current Middle East circumstances is tenuous. Moreover, there is increasing understanding among Western countries for Israel's position, that attaining peace in the Middle East must precede the establishment of a nuclear free zone.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa has been credited with the statement made in the 1990s that Egypt could not tolerate two nuclear states. The chances for the realization of this scenario have greatly increased since then. Even if it is premature to judge if and when Iran will succeed in achieving military nuclear capability, the fact that it is able to enrich uranium demonstrates its technological-scientific superiority over Egypt. Such a reality obliges Egypt to prepare to confront this reality.

Four options stand before Egypt in dealing with the Iranian challenge (competition and threat) and the Israeli challenge (potential competition). The first is the diplomatic option, i.e., continued support for the diplomatic effort. Hovering in the background to diplomacy is the Iranian nuclear program and fears of a chain reaction in the Middle East should Iran achieve military nuclear capability. This would lead the international community to recognize the urgency of the need to advance the issue of a WMD demilitarized zone. Continued involvement in the issue would continue to grant Egypt international prominence, but in terms of confronting the Iranian challenge, this option would have no immediate significance.

The second option is a decision to develop military nuclear capability (a decision that would of course be secret). The first step would be the development of a scientific-technological infrastructure, although this would not supply a short or medium term response to the Iranian challenge.²⁷ Acquiring the ability and developing an infrastructure involve major financial investment, and beyond the budgetary aspect, such a decision would have political-legal aspects. This decision (if it becomes apparent that Egypt is secretly involved in building a nuclear capability) would have implications for its foreign relations and particularly its relations with the US. Whether or not this option is chosen, any announcement concerning the development of scientific-technological infrastructure would serve as a signal of Egypt's intention to confront the new regional circumstances.²⁸

The third option is a combination of the previous two. The fourth option is the acquisition of nuclear weapons from North Korea. The close relations that have developed over the years between Egypt and Pyongyang in the military sphere serve as a convenient platform for Egypt. This option too would have implications for Egypt's foreign relations, particularly with the US.

Israel and Iran are exposing Egypt's weaknesses in both the scientific-technological sphere and in that country's self-image and regional leadership. Today, the ability of Egypt to find an immediate response to these challenges seems limited, as it has no convenient and guaranteed option to deal with the challenges it faces in these contexts.

Notes

- 1 The year 1995 marked twenty-five years since the treaty came into force. The treaty stipulates the need to discuss extending the treaty for an additional term or alternately, as the United States wanted, to extend it with no time limit.
- 2 For Egypt's reaction to the report and details on subsequent related official Egyptian statements, see Ariel Levite and Emily B. Landau, "Arab Perceptions of Israel's Nuclear Posture, 1960-1967," *Israel Studies* 1, no. 1 (1996): 34-59; and Ariel Levite and Emily B. Landau, *Israel's Nuclear Image: Arab Perceptions of Israel's Nuclear Posture* (Tel Aviv: Papyrus Publishing House, 1994).
- 3 For the reaction of President Nasser and his spokesman Heikal to reports concerning Israel's efforts to build a nuclear capability and the implications for Egypt, see the publications cited in note 2. As to a possible military strike, before the Six Day War Egyptian jets engaged in on one or two sorties over the Dimona reactor. There are those who view this as part of Egyptian preparations to attack the reactor.
- 4 In the 1970s and 1980s, deliberations over finding a technological response to the threat led to discussions that concluded with no result; see Barbara M. Gregory, "Egypt's Nuclear Program: Assessing Supplier-Based and Other Developmental Constrains," *Nonproliferation Review* (Fall 1995): 20-27.
- 5 In October 1974, President Anwar Sadat presented a joint Egyptian-Iranian initiative to convert the Middle East into a nuclear free zone. The initiative was tabled as a motion at the UN General Assembly. Since then, the proposal is raised every year at the Assembly. Starting in 1981, Israel has joined the vote (which is accepted by consensus), with explanatory remarks.
- 6 This article is based in part on discussions with Egyptian, American, and Israel interlocutors who for their own reasons asked not to be identified.
- 7 Egyptian experts were apparently in Iraq working on developing the missile until Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The missile's development was not completed following American pressure on Argentina (which supplied the technology) to cease its participation in the project; see Project Wisconsin on Nuclear Arms Control.
- 8 It would be a mistake to view the initiative dealing with all types of WMD as a change of principle in Egypt's approach to the Israeli nuclear issue. According to many, this initiative did not imply any change in Egypt's perception of the centrality of the nuclear issue. The initiative should be viewed in the context in which it was announced; moreover, focusing solely on the matter of the zone's demilitarization would be missing the mark. Indeed, prior to the convening of the

conference in 1995, Egypt returned to focus on nuclear weapons. The chemical and biological threats were, and still are, perceived as secondary.

- 9 White House fact sheet on the Middle East Arms Control Initiative, May 29, 1991.
- 10 See Emily B. Landau, *Arms Control in the Middle East: Cooperative Security Dialogue and Regional Constraints* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006).
- 11 For background to this activity, its achievements, and the reasons for the eventual termination of the ACRS talks, see note 10 and Bruce W. Jentleson and Dalia Dassa Kaye, "Security Status: Explaining Regional Security Cooperation and its Limits in the Middle East," *Security Studies* 8, no. 1 (1998).
- 12 An Egyptian source claimed that already in 1993 it was clear to them that in the face of the Israeli position, there was no chance the nuclear issue would be on the agenda.
- 13 Egypt did not internalize the changes in the region that occurred following the Gulf War and was forced to experience them firsthand in the working groups. Countries such as Jordan and several Gulf states began to develop national positions for themselves that deviated from the Egyptian position; Egypt continued to view itself as expressing the pan-Arab interest. Some of the countries did not share Egypt's insistence that the nuclear issue be placed on the agenda.
- 14 Participants in the talks feel that the disputes that erupted at that time remain unchanged and have perhaps even intensified, considering the changes that have occurred in the arena since then.
- 15 Even if Egyptian politicians and military officials occasionally speak publicly of the security threat to Egypt and the Arab world posed by nuclear arms held by Israel, in conversations with Egyptians, no similar fears are expressed. (An exception in this context is the Egyptian reaction to Foreign Minister Lieberman's statements – which stirred up those leery of Israel's attack intentions – when he talked about destroying the Aswan Dam). Stressing the threat was meant to serve the needs of public diplomacy on the internal, inter-Arab, and international levels. Evidence that the perceived threat is not an existential one can be seen in Sadat's decision during peace negotiations not to convert the nuclear issue into an essential integral element of an agreement. Sadat's decision was an expression of preference for the territorial dimension over the nuclear issue.
- 16 The conference did not extend the treaty by consensus, but declared by consensus that a majority exists for extending the treaty.
- 17 Egypt criticized the US decision to "allow" the Indian nuclear program. Among other concerns, Egypt feared that Israel would follow in India's wake. Nonetheless, American analysts judged that the chances for Israel to gain similar permission in the near future were at best slim.
- 18 Points in President Obama's speech that relate to the NPT include: the need to take immediate steps against countries that violate the treaty and those that try to withdraw from it; establishment of an international nuclear fuel bank in order to stem the danger of proliferation; the need, in light of the North Korean experience, to create a framework to ensure that countries that violate the treaty bear the consequences of their deeds; an assertion of Iran's right, under strict

IAEA inspection, to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes; the assertion that Iran's surface-to-surface missile program and its activity in the nuclear sphere are a genuine threat not only to the US and Iran's neighbors, but also to US allies. So long as that threat remains in force, the US will continue its plan to build a surface-to-surface missile defense system.

- 19 The agreement that later served as the basis for the resolution that was passed included: making nuclear commerce with Israel conditional upon its acceding to the NPT as a non-nuclear weapons state and placing all of its facilities under IAEA supervision; and convening an international conference in 2012 to discuss the establishment of Middle East nuclear weapons free zone (the idea for convening such an international conference was raised in 2004 at the Arab League Summit).
- 20 During the discussions, the US opposed a final document that would specifically name Israel, but it was forced to retract its opposition after it was made clear that the Clinton administration gave its agreement to name Israel in the final document from the 2000 conference.
- 21 The full text can be found in the final document published at the conclusion of the conference.
- 22 It is clear that the final document did not meet Israeli expectations, and the administration's conduct prior to formulating it was likely disturbing to Israel. After the conference, President Obama and National Security Advisor James Jones publicized announcements that sought to allay Israel's concerns and somewhat mitigate the sting of the final document that enabled the administration to see the conference through to a successful conclusion. It is doubtful if this maneuvering added to the administration's credibility. In a public statement Obama reiterated US support for establishing a WMD free zone and for the conviction that a sustainable peace and full compliance are precursors to the establishment of such a zone. He added that the US was absolutely opposed to singling out Israel and was opposed to any steps that would endanger Israel's national security. A statement by the National Security Advisor stated that despite the administration's support for the final document, it had serious reservations over one aspect of the Middle East resolution. He reiterated the President's words regarding a comprehensive and sustainable peace and also referred to the need for compliance with obligations related to arms control and preventing arms proliferation as essential precursors to establishing the WMDFZ. To his understanding, establishing a WMD demilitarized Middle East zone is a long term objective. He made it clear that in order for a regional conference to be effective, it must ensure the participation of all Middle East countries as well as additional countries. The National Security Advisor also specified what from the US standpoint were necessary conditions for holding the conference. He concluded that in light of the way Israel was being singled out, prospects were doubtful for convening a conference in 2012 that includes participation of all key countries of the region. This situation will continue until it can be assured that the conference would be held without discrimination and in a constructive manner. In my conversation with an American source, he jokingly commented that

Israel apparently slept throughout President Obama's speech in Prague. Had Israel listened to his words and subsequently arranged a discussion between the President and the Prime Minister over the speech's significance regarding the Middle East, it might have prevented what actually happened. The same source added that in preparations for a 2012 conference, Israel would do well if it were to hold this conversation (that didn't take place) in order to prevent what from its standpoint would be undesirable developments. Following the conference, added the source, there should not be any doubt concerning the President's determination to work towards the elimination of all nuclear arms.

- 23 Evidence of the gap between official statements and unofficial positions can be found in a cable from the US embassy in Cairo in early 2009, published by WikiLeaks, which mentions President Mubarak's loathing for Iran, which seeks to undermine the stability of the region and particularly that of Egypt. There is no doubt, the cable states, that Egypt views Iran as the greatest threat in the long term, due both to its development of a nuclear capability and its efforts to export the Shiite revolution.
- 24 Even if the chances of settling the nuclear crisis between the US and Iran in the near future are slim, Egyptian sources have raised concerns that it would pave the way for cooperation between the two on a series of regional issues – which would harm Egypt's standing. There are also concerns in Egyptian circles over a potential Israel-Iran rapprochement, which would likewise have implications for Egypt's regional status.
- 25 The statement that in order for Israel to be accepted as part of the region, it has to be brought down to size has been attributed to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Presumably he did not only mean this in respect to territory, but also to nuclear capabilities.
- 26 In 1995 – to extend the NPT indefinitely; in 2010 – to conclude the conference successfully, testimony to the seriousness of President Obama's intentions in the sphere of nuclear disarmament.
- 27 An Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities would likely have several advantages as far as Egypt is concerned. It would grant Egypt a longer time period to implement any decisions that are reached; furthermore, an Israeli attack would not only entangle Israel but would also be a blow to Iran.
- 28 Aside from demonstrating scientific capability, nuclear acquisition could grant Egypt further independence and freedom of action – which it feels Israel gained by this capability.