

Nuclear weapons in the middle east politics essay



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Nuclear weapons are weapons of mass destruction which are capable of wiping out an unimaginably large number of people. Today, five member nations, the United States of America, Russia, United Kingdom, France and the People's Republic of China are internationally recognized as " nuclear weapons nations" by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and are thus permitted to possess nuclear weapons. Two non-signatory members, India and Pakistan also possess these weapons and have conducted nuclear weapon tests. In addition to these seven members, Israel is strongly suspected of possessing nuclear weapons although it has neither confirmed it nor denied it. There is also speculation the Iran might be running a covert nuclear weapons program. Finally, North Korea has publicly declared itself to be in possession of nuclear weapons but this fact has never been confirmed as it has not conducted any substantial nuclear tests. There is an urgent need to limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons across the world as they pose a great threat to international security and their usage could lead to catastrophe. Today, this issue is especially relevant to North Korea and the Middle East where the lack of agreements and the prevalence of ambiguities regarding nuclear programs is becoming an issue of global concern.

Countries associated with nuclear weapons³

Definition of Key Terms

Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

The NPT is a treaty that came into force in 1970, in order to limit nuclear proliferation. It prohibits non nuclear weapon states from developing, possessing or acquiring nuclear weapons or explosives. The three pillars of

the treaty are non proliferation, disarmament and the peaceful use of nuclear technology. Currently, it has not been signed by India, Pakistan and Israel.

Nuclear weapons

Nuclear weapons are extremely destructive and explosive weapons that derives its force through either fission reactions or both fission and fusion.

Nuclear Proliferation

“ Nuclear proliferation is a term now used to describe the spread of nuclear weapons, fissile material, and weapons-applicable nuclear technology and information, to nations which are not recognized as “ Nuclear Weapon States” by the NPT.” 1

Nuclear weapons free zone

A Nuclear weapons free zone is a geographical area recognized by the United Nations that has banned the use and development of nuclear weapon technology and has put measures into place to check its implementation.

Nuclear Disarmament

Nuclear disarmament is a proposal to dismantle nuclear weapons in order to reduce the possibility of the occurrence of a nuclear war.

Background Information

The first nuclear weapon was invented by USA, Britain and Canada during the Second World War. USA remains the only country to have ever used it.

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Soon after, during the Cold War, the world saw the beginning of the nuclear arms race. Following the Second World War, Korea was divided into two geographical regions: the northern controlled by the Soviets and the southern controlled by USA. Also, Israel is believed to have begun investigating the nuclear field soon after it was founded in 1948. In the 1950s the nuclear program in Iran was established for peaceful purposes under the supervision of the United States.

The Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) was signed in 1963 which banned the test of nuclear weapons underwater, in the atmosphere or in outer space. This treaty was not signed by China and France who are both nuclear weapons states today.

The conflict between the communist North Korea and the capitalist South Korea has been going on since 1950 and there have been repeated failures to consolidate the two as one unified nation. Even today, the two countries have not officially made peace. Hence, ever since the 1970s, North Korea began its pursuit of acquiring nuclear weapons.

In 1967, a CIA report claimed that Israel had the materials required to construct a bomb. In 1979, a US satellite reported a flash in the Indian Ocean that was similar to a nuclear denotation and could have possibly been a nuclear test conducted by Israel. It is speculated to be one of the apparently few joint nuclear tests conducted by South Africa and Israel.

Minimal progress was made in nuclear disarmament until 1991 and the Comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty (CTBT) was adopted in 1996 which banned all nuclear explosions in all environment for military or civilian

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testing. It was signed by 182 countries and ratified by 153 and was aimed at stopping the nuclear arms race.

Iran ratified the NPT in 1970s which subjected it to IAEA inspections. Today, the main reason for suspicion of Iran's nuclear program is its failure to declare sensitive enrichment and reprocessing activities to the IAEA.

In 1992, North Korea entered a safe guard's agreement under Article 3 of the NPT which allowed IAEA inspectors to inspect North Korea's nuclear materials. In 1993, North Korea threatened to withdraw from the NPT which it had acceded to earlier. However, this did not ultimately happen as USA and North Korea came to an agreement by which North Korea would suspend all nuclear reactors in exchange for in exchange for alternative energy resources. North Korea withdrew from the IAEA in 1994 and launched a missile over the Sea of Japan in 1998 which caused USA to review its policies towards the country.

Relations between the two countries remained turbulent. In 2002, the North Korean Deputy Secretary apparently acknowledged the existence of a covert nuclear-weapons development program. North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2003 and in response; the US launched six way talks about the issue with North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan and Russia. North Korea, once again, agreed to abandon all nuclear weapon activities. However, like previous agreements, North Korea did not commit to it. It declared that it had nuclear weapons and withdrew from the six party talks in 2005. In October, 2006 North Korea announced plans for its first nuclear test. North Korea did conduct an explosive underground test but there are doubts as to whether it

really was a nuclear test since the magnitude of the blast was less than expected.

As far as Iran is concerned, in March 2010, Iran declared itself as a nuclear state and president Ahmadinejad announced “ I want to announce with a loud voice here that the first consignment of 20 percent enriched uranium was produced and was put at the disposal of the scientists.” However, Iran reiterated that it will use this only for peaceful purposes. “ We have the capability to enrich uranium more than 20 percent or 80 percent but we don’t enrich (to this level) because we don’t need it.”

Evidently, there has been a great turn of events regarding the development and legitimacy of nuclear weapons in North Korea, Iran and Israel. A clear agreement in the case of all three countries has yet to be formed.

General Overview

Nuclear Deterrence

The argument of those who possess nuclear weapons is that it enables them to ward off or deter nuclear or conventional attack through threat of disastrous retaliation. This could be incentive to possess nuclear weapons. DPRK has been accused of using nuclear weapons as a political tool to normalize relations with USA, Japan, and South Korea and to end the embargo against North Korea. North Korea will thus be unwilling to give up nuclear weapons without substantial concessions from USA and South Korea, among others. On the other hand, Iran has entirely denied seeking nuclear weapons for retaliation or nuclear deterrence.

Transfer

One of the greatest concerns with nuclear weapons is that it could end up in the wrong hands. Not only could countries possessing them sell them to others, thus encouraging nuclear proliferation, but nuclear weapons could also be sold to or stolen by non-state actors. If such a situation were to arise, it would have severe implications on the national security of several countries.

For instance, DPRK has refrained from selling its nuclear weapons and materials. However, in the case of harsh sanctions being imposed on the country, it could retaliate and sell its nuclear weapons. Out of this fear, China has prevented the Security Council from authorizing the use of force or imposing truly harsh sanctions on the country.

Similarly, in 1975, there were rumors that Israel offered to sell its nuclear weapons to South Africa. Israel has vehemently denied the claim.

Israel-Iran Relations

The turbulent relationship between Israel and Iran dates back to the Islamic Revolution in the 1970s. Both countries are suspected of having a nuclear weapons program and blame each other for threatening the security of the Middle East by doing so.

Iran's extreme hostility towards USA and Israel is probably the reason that has caused many to consider Iran to be the greatest threat in the Middle East. Iran itself is not a democracy and does not recognize the right to

freedom of speech and expression. In addition, it refuses to acknowledge Israel as a country and refers to Israel as an 'occupied territory.'

However, many are angered at the fact that although there is no proof that Iran plans on developing nuclear weapons it is being faced with threats of dire consequences by the USA and Europe where as there is comparatively less pressure on Israel which is practicing opacity as far as its nuclear plan is concerned.

On the other hand, seeing as Israel is a democracy, people believe that it can be trusted with its power. Israel also has a reputation of being relatively more reliable and predictable. It is considered less likely to misuse its nuclear weapons through an arbitrary attack.

However, Israel's intentional ambiguity regarding nuclear development in the country could be considered as a catalyst for the prospect of a nuclear arms race in the region. There are rumours that Israel may have up to 400 nuclear warheads.

Egypt and 17 other Middle Eastern countries want Israel's nuclear capabilities to be discussed with the IAEA since they have all signed the NPT and believe that Israel's accession to the NPT is essential to establish regional peace. Israel's current status is considered by some to be a provocation of nuclear proliferation. Israel refuses to sign the NPT without a comprehensive regional peace agreement as until then it requires its ambiguity about its nuclear weapons capability as a deterrent.

It is important to note that although the world is split regarding who is to be blamed, both Israel and Iran are in a situation that can possibly lead to a destabilizing arms race in the Middle East and are key players in the possibility of establishing a nuclear free zone in the Middle East. Thus any agreement that does not involve the two countries will result in stalemate.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Israel

Israel is the only country in the Middle East that is not a part of the NPT and is suspected by the IAEA to have nuclear weapons. Israel refuses to admit or deny possessing nuclear arsenal, or developing nuclear weapons and is using this ambiguity about its nuclear weapons capability as a deterrent. It is a good ally of USA and a hostile enemy of Iran.

Iran

Iran is a part of the NPT and strongly asserts that its nuclear technology, including enrichment is solely for civilian purposes but the IAEA has been unable to verify it. It is strongly suspected that the program is concealing the development of nuclear weapons. Iran claims that Israel is the only obstacle to establishing a nuclear weapons free zone and has stated its intentions to “wipe Israel of the map.” Iran has been subjected to four rounds of sanctions by the Security Council of the United Nation in order to urge it to halt its nuclear program.

USA

USA, today, has the largest quantity of nuclear weapons in the world but is trying to gradually cut them down under the Obama administration. It strongly condemns both North Korea and Iran for their nuclear program and is unwilling to accept either of the two as nuclear powers.

China

China has been reluctant to back the sanctions against Iran as it supports the Iran's nuclear program for civilian use. It is believed to have helped Iran with its missile development programs. It is North Korea's most important ally, biggest trading partner and main source of food, arms and fuel. China has not expressed outright defiance against USA in order to protect its relations with the country and has supported some UN sanctions against Iran.

Russia

Russia believes that every nation has the right to self defense and therefore sees Iran's nuclear program as legitimate. It has strong ties with Iran and has opposed unilateral sanction imposed on it by USA. However, Russia has urged Iran to change its stance. Russia has also been accused of assisting North Korea and Iran with their nuclear program.

IAEA

The IAEA is an international organization that promotes the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The IAEA believes that every nation has the right to an authorized and monitored nuclear program for peaceful purposes; however, nations should not attempt to pursue nuclear weapons in any form.

Timeline of Events

Date

Description of event

1945

USA conducts its first nuclear test

1946

Russia conducts its first nuclear test

1952

UK conducts its first nuclear test

1964

China conducts its first nuclear test

1963

Partial Test Ban Treaty

1968

NPT signed

1974

India's first nuclear test

1985

North Korea accedes to the NPT

1990

France's first nuclear test

December 31, 1991

North and South Korea sign the South-North Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

March 6, 1992

US imposes sanctions upon North Korea for missile proliferation activities

September, 1992

IAEA inspectors discover discrepancies in North Korea's "initial report" on its nuclear program and ask for clarification on several issues, including the amount of reprocessed plutonium in North Korea.

February 9, 1993

North Korea denies IAEA inspections of two sites believed to store nuclear waste.

1993

North Korea threatens to withdraw from the NPT

1994

Agreed Framework

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June 13, 1994

North Korea withdraws from NPT

1996

Comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty (CTBT) adopted

1998

Pakistan's first nuclear test

Feb 15, 1994

North Korea permits IAEA inspections in 7 of its sites

May 24, 1996

The United States imposes sanctions on North Korea and Iran for missile technology-related transfers

April 25, 1999

“ The United States, South Korea, and Japan establish the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group to institutionalize close consultation and policy coordination in dealing with North Korea” 4

2002

President G W Bush names North Korea as a member of the Axis of Evil

October 16, 2002

US announces that North Korea has admitted to possessing nuclear weapons

January 10, 2003

North Korea withdraws from NPT

October 9, 2006

North Korea conducts an underground explosive test

2009

North Korea conducts another test

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Sanctions on Iran

The Security Council has imposed four rounds of sanction upon Iran in its resolutions 1737, 1747, 1803 and 1929. The UN Security Council began imposing sanctions on Iran since 2006, when it failed to comply with IAEA requirements and continued uranium enrichment activities. The sanctions have included “ bans on exports of nuclear, missile, and dual-use technologies; limiting travel by dozens of Iranian officials; and freezing the assets of forty individuals and entities, including Bank Sepah and various front companies.” 2

In addition, USA and EU have individually imposed further sanctions on Iran which have targeted its trade, finances and energy sector.

Russia has supported the weaker Security Council sanctions against Iran but opposed the stronger ones imposed individually by the USA. It is against any <https://assignbuster.com/nuclear-weapons-in-the-middle-east-politics-essay/>

unilateral sanctions and although a fourth round of sanctions was imposed, it faced resistance from Russia and China, both of which maintain strong economic ties with Iran. They opposed it due to their individual economic and political interests. According to critics, the lack of support from these two nations could have weakened the overall affect of the sanctions.

The sanctions imposed are believed to have had limited success as Iran still holds an aggressive stance as to continuing its nuclear program and asserts that is it permitted to do so for civilian use as per the NPT. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said: “ The Iranian nation will not succumb to bullying, invasion and the violation of its rights.” 5

Talks with DPRK

Several attempts have been made to establish a nuclear free Korean-peninsula but all efforts until today have been unsuccessful and DPRK has withdrawn from all treaties it has acceded to. This is probably because DRPK has only been signing treaties out of international pressure, not voluntarily.

Agreed Framework

The United States and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework on October 21, 1994 by which DPRK agreed to freeze operation and construction of nuclear reactors in exchange for two light water reactors and the relaxation of economic sanctions. The Agreed Framework resolved the ongoing 18 month crisis during which DRPK threatened to withdraw from the NPT. However, there were difficulties regarding the financing of reactors caused the plan to be behind schedule. Infuriated, DPRK violated the agreements

which caused USA to persuade KEDO suspend shipments to the country. This marked the end of the agreement. In comparison to other attempts, this one probably had the greatest chance of success as it offered DPRK to end its nuclear program in exchange for realistic concessions made by other countries.

Six Party Talks

The six party concerning DPRK's nuclear program involved United States, North Korea, China, Japan, Russia and, South Korea as was a result of North Korea withdrawing from the NPT in 2003. Until today, six rounds of the six party talks have been held. Due to the conflicting aims of the members involved, minimal progress was achieved. During the third phase of the fifth round, North Korea agreed to shut down its nuclear facilities in exchange for fuel aid the normalization of relations with Japan and USA.

These talks eventually ended when North Korea launched a satellite despite international pressure not to do so. It was believed to be a test of its prototype Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM). In February 2005, North Korea declared that it had nuclear weapons for self defense and pulled out of the six party talks. DPRK expelled all nuclear inspectors and resumed its nuclear weapons program.

Possible Solutions

As evident from the past, Iran has been adamant about its position and the authenticity of its nuclear program. For any further progress to be made Iran and the West need to cooperate. Prior to creating any framework for

agreements, Iran must be given recognition for its right to exist as an Islamic Republic, and its minimum security concerns must be acknowledged as legitimate. Thus, military strike either by USA or by Israel against Iran's possible nuclear program would be disastrous as it would possibly cause Iran to retaliate which is a concern of global security and lead to regional catastrophe.

The underlying problem in the Middle East crisis is the lack of trust and the increasing hostility between Iran and Israel. Solutions to resolve this issue should focus on reduce the fears of existential destruction that the two nations harbor towards each other. Iran must recognize the importance of moderating its bellicose stance whereas Israel checks its threats to attack Iran.

In order to moderate any development of the negotiations between Israel and Iran, the Security Council should provide security guarantees to both countries and assess their concerns of security risks.

Another way of addressing the issue would be to provide financial incentives to Iran; large enough to buy up the nuclear energy specialized for civilian use, if Iran completely halts its current nuclear program.

One way of addressing the issue of North Korea would be to provide it with concessions such as providing it with substitute forms of energy for its civilian nuclear program and cutting back economic sanctions based on any agreement that has been reached upon. However, these are only possible if North Korea agrees to comply with any solutions reached upon.

Although diplomacy is a great tool to resolve conflicts, many believe that as North Korea has repeatedly proved itself to be unreliable as far as agreements are concerned, a more aggressive option might be appropriate. However, it is important to note that any aggressive military action could possibly worsen matters. Constructive solutions would include measures to normalize relations between North Korea and all other states. As of today the most viable solution would be to establish a nuclear free zone in North Korea but it is difficult to implement. All problems that arise as a consequence of implementing such a solution must therefore also be addressed.