

Why should a region as volatile as the middle east have nuclear weapons research ...

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Introduction & Background

Since the onset of the 2000s, possible nuclear arms race in the Middle East region has been the focus of the international community. The past decade saw Iran attempts to install nuclear weaponry face harsh criticism and opposition from the western powers. The west believes that if the Persian state succeeds, the already volatile Middle East would be a threat against international peace. Presently, according to intelligence reports, Israel is believed to possess nuclear weaponry though the current regime led by Benjamin Netanyahu continues to deny this. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty does not recognize Israel as a Nuclear Weapon State because inspections have never been carried out in the nation state. Though Israel continues to maintain a ' nuclear ambiguity' policy, that is the nation has not admitted officially to own nuclear weapons, many observers believe that the small state is currently the nuclear power house in the Middle East.

The most vexing foreign policy challenge facing Obama's administration is what action to take against Iran's alleged nuclear programs. In the past, the United States has meddled severally with Iran's internal affairs. For instance, through nuclear inspections conducted by the International Atomic Energy Agency, America has threatened to take military action and enforce economic sanctions against Iran if the nation failed to comply with its demands that it abandons its alleged nuclear programs. From Tehran's viewpoint, Iran feels insecure because its rival Israel is estimated to have between 100 - 200 nuclear warheads. Pakistan and North Korea also own atomic weaponry. Tehran's attempt to emerge as a middle east power house

have been shattered in the past decade by the Invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan on both sides of its borders, forcing it to halt its the development of nuclear in the year 2003.

Issues

Tehran's regime is viewed as one that cannot be trusted by the western powers to own nuclear arsenals. It is wiser for the U. S. not to pay much attention to Iran's development of atomic weapons, but to focus on ways of preventing the Islamic republic from using them for destructive purposes. However, U. S. leaders do not support this course of action and have repeatedly rejected the idea. The U. S. president, Mr. Barack Obama was quoted saying ' a nuclear armed Tehran is a challenge that cannot be contained easily.' At the same time, military action is viewed as the last regrettable resort that will have to be implemented if Iran continues with its ambition of acquiring nuclear weaponry.

The situation continues to worsen as deeply engraved mistrust continues to grow between the American and Iranian leadership. According to Alexander George who is a renowned political scientist, ' coercive diplomacy' is to blame for the worsening relations between the West and Tehran. Recently, senior non-proliferation specialists issued a report in Washington recommending that the Obama's administration must implement ' maximal' economic sanctions against Iran. That is the implementation of international embargo on investments and trade with Tehran. Coercive diplomacy is likely to fail because Iran's nuclear program is for the purpose of energy and partly driven by the desire of the Arab state to protect itself against attacks by

perceived enemies such as Israel. Therefore, the U. S threat to attack only succeeds in heightening the already perceived danger and raises the determination of the Iranian regime to develop weapons of mass destruction.

On the other hand, the allayed fears by the western powers seem reasonable. In the event that Iran acquires nuclear capability, the Arab state is likely to become increasingly aggressive and this would threaten the United States' allies in the Middle East such as Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, who will be forced to pursue their own nuclear capabilities. Consequently, this might raise the possibility of the emergence of an unstable nuclear arms race in the region.

Complicating issues

The fact Israel has nuclear capability and is categorized among the four nuclear-armed nations that are not recognized by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as Nuclear Weapons States continues to heighten instability in the Middle East. The Jewish state has never openly admitted to own and operate nuclear weapons. Instead, it has adopted a policy called 'nuclear ambiguity.' During the past years, Israel has resorted to issuing statements such as 'it will not be the first nation in the middle east to introduce nuclear weapons in the region.' Such propaganda only heightens the determination of neighboring Arab states to initiate and pursue their own nuclear capability to safeguard themselves against the perceived enemy - Israel. Currently, observers and political analysts believe the Jewish state has held nuclear monopoly in the Middle East for the past four decades and is

determined to continue doing so. For instance, the 1981 and 2007 bombings on Iraq and Syria respectively with impunity are viewed as efforts to counter challenges to its nuclear technology. However, in the end this tact is likely to be unsustainable. Israel should come out clean and announce officially its nuclear capability.

The other complicating issue is the perceived American continued meddling and involvement in the Middle East affairs by Arab states such as Iran, Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The superpower is perceived to be an ally of Israel and not a neutral moderator likely to establish peace in the volatile region. The irony is that Iran was the first state to propose the idea of realizing a nuclear free zone Middle East 40 years ago. After the 1979 revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, a religious and politician rose to power and disbanded the clandestine research program terming it evil from his religious perspective. Back then, Israel had secretly acquired nuclear capability and to this day holds the monopoly in the region. Since the U. S invasion of Iraq, Tehran has continually pushed for regional security in the Middle East. Iran has been compliant and has gone to the extent of ratifying the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Tehran regime has in the past given consent to inspection of its reactors by officials from the IAEA for approximately 4000 man-days. Consequently, out of these inspections, the US national Intelligence declared Iran does not run active nuclear weapons programme. On the contrary, Israel has not signed the NPT treaty and has not given consent to the IAEA to carry even a single inspection to its facilities. Despite

this, the U. S continues to issue punitive sanctions against Iran and other Arab states that are viewed as a threat to Israel's existence.

Consequently, this approach has yet yielded another complication, which is nuclear weapons imbalance in the Middle East. Israel's monopoly that has remarkably lasted for 4 decades unchecked by the western powers continues to fuel instability in the region. After all, power begs to be balanced for a region to maintain peace. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in the Middle East. The western powers continued support to allow Israel to maintain nuclear edge over its neighbors who are perceived rivals continues to emerge as unsustainable in the long term. This is because Israel's proven ability to strike its neighbors such as Palestine, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt with impunity in the past raises anxiety in the region forcing its neighbors to seek ways of preventing the Jewish state from doing the same in the future. This is the reason why attempts to counter the nuclear arms race in the Middle East might turn out futile in the long run.

Possible solutions

Several possible solutions can be pursued to end the current stalemate in the Middle East region. The first possible solution is that all nations in the Middle East acknowledge the right to Israel's existence. The United Nations established the Jewish state in a legal and peaceful process in the year 1948 after the end of the Second World War. However, Palestine maintains that Israel was created out of its territory. Since the year 1948, a series of wars have been raged against Israel by Arab states such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Kuwait. Presently, the incumbent Israeli Prime minister,

Benjamin Netanyahu claims that the root of unending conflict in the Middle East is the refusal of Israeli's right to exist. Perhaps this explains why the Jewish state prefers to continue to hold nuclear monopoly to its aggressors. Peace can be achieved if Palestine acknowledges Israel's right to exist since other Arab nationals are likely to follow suit. Consequently, peaceful co-existence can be achieved in the region.

In addition, another possible solution to end the crisis in the Middle East is for the United States to maintain a neutral stance and minimize its involvement in the volatile regional affairs. Over the years, Arab states have increasingly continued to deny Israel's right to exist partly because the Jewish state is viewed as a proxy for the United States in the region. The western powers have turned a blind eye on Israel's nuclear activities and focused more on imposing economic sanctions against Arab states such as Iran that have even complied with demands of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The conflict has worsened since the disastrous invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan in the year 2003. Insecurity is now rife in the region. Terror groups such as Hezbollah, Al Qaeda, and the Palestinian Liberation front have since emerged. The Invasion of Iran might also turn out catastrophic in the long term. Therefore, a possible solution to the crisis is for the U. S to stop its meddling in the affairs of the region.

Lastly, another possible solution is for Israel to abandon its nuclear activity since the Jewish state already has a capable, advanced, and well-equipped military that can safely guard its borders. This will help to minimize tension in the region, which as discussed previously emanates from the fact that

Israel holds such weapons of mass destruction and the neighboring Arab states feel insecure. However, Israel is unlikely to agree to this immediately because in the past it has denied that it operates nuclear warheads through its 'ambiguity policy.' In addition, the Jewish regime feels it is surrounded by hostile Arab states that favor the Palestine, and therefore prefers to own nuclear capacity to feel safe against aggression by its hostile neighbors. Therefore, this option sounds unrealistic and is unlikely to be accepted by Israel therefore should be ruled out. Policy makers instead should focus on the previous two possible solutions to the Middle East conflict. The first is to campaign for the recognition of Israel's right to exist, and secondly the western powers should adopt a neutral stance so that they are not seen as favoring the Israeli. If these two measures are implemented, conflict in the region is likely to reduce significantly

Recommendation

The current stalemate has risen because the western powers fear that Iran is focusing on building nuclear bombs under the pretext of civilian nuclear energy programme. The Iran regime has continued to defend itself that it is enriching its uranium reserves for purposes of generating civilian energy, and not building atomic bombs. Most recently, the Iranian regime has demonstrated willingness to cooperate on ways of ending the stalemate. The Arab state foreign minister, Mr. Ali Akbar Salehi was quoted saying time has come to end the nation's standoff with the western powers over its controversial nuclear program. The current nuclear imbalance in the Middle East region worries Iranians.

However, the best way to end the stalemate that threatens to turn into a military invasion of the Arab republic by the U. S and Israel consequently hurt the already fragile world economy that is recovering from the 2008 recession, is to hold fruitful diplomacy. Iran could be allowed to install nuclear reactors for production of energy under supervision by NPT officials. A red line could be established limiting any attempts to turn the reactors into making atomic weaponry. The western powers should avoid using coercive diplomacy so that they give the hardliner Iranian regime a way out of the crisis and an opportunity to save face. This is because coercive diplomacy has failed to work in the past, for instance the invasion of Iraq where weaponry of mass destruction were not found. The U. S government spent billions of dollars and global prices of oil rose rapidly because of reduced supply after Saddam ordered the bombing of the minefields.

Anticipated outcome

In a recap, if fruitful diplomatic missions are carried out between the West and Iran, then a possible conflict that is on its way could be avoided. The first step towards yielding fruitful diplomatic outcomes is for parties involved in the conflict to understand the perspective of their rivals. For instance, Iran needs to understand that Israel and America are fearful that if it owned nuclear arsenal, then this could lead to instability in the larger region because the Persian state could turn aggressive towards its neighbors. On the other hand, the Israelis and Americans need to understand that Iran feels vulnerable without the bomb. When the parties view the problems from both perspectives, then it would be easy for the parties to reach a conclusive

agreement. Israel and Iran could agree to tone down the war propaganda that has been circulated by journalists affiliated to both sides. Furthermore, Israel could agree to make an official admittance of its nuclear capability and demonstrate willingness to commit itself in the end to destroy its nuclear warheads if the region continued to stabilize. In addition, the Arab states should accord and recognize Israel's right to exist. If this progress realized, the Middle East could become peaceful and stable overtime. Terrorist groupings with time could become irrelevant and disbanded to promote peace. The possibility of having a nuclear weapons free Middle East could turn in to a reality within a few decades. Eventually, the world would breathe a sigh of relief if the conflict eventually ends.

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