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MIDEAST NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE ZONE ESTABLISHMENT

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At the beginning of the second millennium world powers could confidently claim that the nuclear non-proliferation regime (NPR) was quite successful and withstood the test of time. Besides, the issue of proliferation showed a trend towards regionalization. The proliferation of nuclear weapons (NW) remains one of the biggest threats to the Middle East (ME) security architecture where the process of counteracting the states' nuclearization is in the limelight. There are the largest footholds of international terrorism in the ME and it's worth taking non-state actors' threat into account [1, p.8]. In this article, it seems necessary to focus on the danger of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and evaluate the posture of Nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East (MENWFZ).

One of the main problems hindering the creation of a NWFZ in the ME is the presence of NW in Israel. Israel's possession of NW and their means of delivery is universally recognized. Thus, the need to create a NWFZ in the ME is very acute. Israel also doesn't support Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), what gives the opportunity to develop weapons-grade nuclear materials without any obstacles [1, p. 4]. Israel, being a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), doesn't participate in international arms control and ignores the idea of creating a MENWFZ [2, p. 100]. At the same time, Israel's abandonment of NW is much more difficult to achieve due to a special US-Israeli relationship.

It is also worth mentioning that nuclear arsenals are stationed at NATO military bases in Turkey. Turkey is also developing a series of ballistic missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. It is a controversial question whether USA should remove NW from Turkey or not. Thus, Turkey is of great concern not only because of its territorial location, but also because of the instability of the political regime [3].

An analysis of Iran's nuclear program may give the impression that national security considerations, regional prestige and domestic political considerations tend to favor the development of a military nuclear program. At the same time, interest in cooperation with the West as well as fear of pre-emptive military actions work against such a program [4]. Since Donald Trump withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and imposed damaging sanctions, Iran has ramped up the enrichment program far beyond the limits [5]. Perhaps Biden's arrival in the Oval Office will have a positive effect on the JCPOA in the long run.

Unfortunately, nuclear status has become a national priority and Iran's development of nuclear technologies has already resulted in the "atomic domino effect".

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Especially, if Iran acquires NW, the game in the region will change and the threat of nuclear proliferation in the ME will increase [2, p. 97-98]. Saudi Arabia will direct all efforts to create its own nuclear arsenal, Egypt or Algeria would also launch a NW program [6]. Since it will be extremely difficult for other states in the ME to gain access to nuclear weapons alone, it can't be ruled out that non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS) will unite their efforts in the nuclear field [3]. The concerns of international community regarding Iran's nuclear program along with the risk of religious fanatics coming to power in some countries are creating barriers to peaceful use of nuclear energy in the ME.

The issue of the establishment of a MENWFZ has been discussed for many years. The initiative to create a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East belongs to the Soviet leadership, which in 1958 put forward a similar idea. The UN General Assembly following the proposal by Iran and Egypt first endorsed calls for the establishment of a MENWFZ in 1974. The 1991 Madrid Peace Conference established a multinational mechanism to work on making MENWFZ [7]. One of the most important steps taken by the world community was the decision of the 1995 Non-proliferation Treaty Review Conference (NPT RevCon) for "the establishment of an effectively verifiable Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical and biological, and their delivery systems" [8]. All states in the ME have expressed support for a multilateral regional non-proliferation framework [9, p. 10]. Even though the topic of creating a MENWFZ has been discussed in the international community, it has not yet been possible to achieve any tangible result on the implementation of the 1995 Middle East resolution. The 'Arab Spring' froze the negotiation process on nuclear security in the ME for a long time. At the same time, it must be admitted that in 2019 there was held a very significant November UN Conference on the creation of a MEWMDFZ [4].

In terms of MENWFZ Russia plays a pivotal role. Since 1995, Russia has been making consistent efforts to make the MENWFZ a reality. The Foreign minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov said, "Russia supports the establishment of the zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery in the Middle East. Unfortunately, this zone in this particular region have not materialized, but we keep on trying" [10]. Therefore, despite the unfavorable international situation, Russia should continue to actively defend its position on the issue of MENWFZ. However, Russia can't do the "homework" for those who are responsible for it, namely, for the states of the ME themselves [8].

Thus, it is clear that the reluctance of the international community to take steps towards nuclear non-proliferation in the ME and the creation of additional guarantees is a serious threat to NPT. Establishment of the MENWFZ isn't an easy task, but relative success can only be achieved with the goodwill of all participants. While the active participation and consent of all regional states would be an ideal basis for starting the NWFZ process in the ME, the first steps towards implementation of the zone could be taken 'without Israel on a board'. The international community shouldn't freeze the discussion of this issue. The sides must intensify efforts in this direction, primarily through multilateral dialogue with the aim of finding common ground for

developing a set of measures to guarantee security to the countries of the ME in the absence of WMD.

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