

# Chapter 18

## The Israeli National Perspective on Nuclear Non-proliferation



Merav Zafary-Odiz

Israel is subject to multiple regional threats. In Israel's view, since its threats are regional in nature, non-proliferation issues are closely linked to the regional context. It therefore considers mostly regional considerations rather than global ones when devising its non-proliferation policies. A longstanding policy since the 1960s, supported by all Israeli governments since its inception, is that Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East. Accordingly, Israel conducts a responsible policy of restraint in the nuclear domain. Israel's approach to nuclear testing is a relevant case in point. Actual and potential regional threats to Israel, as well as Israel's uniquely narrow security margins, mandate that any arms-control-related measure has to be closely linked to regional security, while addressing the threat perceptions of all regional parties.

Israel is fully committed to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and to participation in international efforts to prevent their spread. Israel thus recognizes the value of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and supported its adoption in 1968 in the UN General Assembly. However, a global regime like the NPT has limited relevance in the Middle East. Its weakness in the Middle East has been demonstrated by four cases of violations of the Treaty's basic obligations, namely by Iraq, Libya, Syria and Iran. Syria's use of chemical weapons is another case in point, as this is a recent use by a Middle Eastern country of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Based on the poor track record of NPT compliance in the region, Israel does not see NPT membership as a goal in and of itself, but rather as potential means for enhancing security for all states. In this regard, Israel does not believe that NPT membership serves or would enhance its national security. Rather, Israel believes that in due course a regional solution lies in the establishment of a mutually, effectively, and comprehensibly verifiable zone free of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDFZ). However, this noble idea is unfortunately detached from

---

M. Zafary-Odiz (✉)

Israeli Atomic Energy Commission, Tel Aviv, Israel  
e-mail: mzafary@iaec.gov.il

© The Author(s) 2018

L. Maiani et al. (eds.), *International Cooperation for Enhancing Nuclear Safety, Security, Safeguards and Non-proliferation—60 Years of IAEA and EURATOM*, Springer Proceedings in Physics 206, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-57366-2\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-57366-2_18)

117

the volatile regional realities. It is clear that the prerequisites for regional discussions on such a zone, such as mutual recognition, do not currently exist in the Middle East, where the majority of Arab States, as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran, do not even recognize the existence of the State of Israel, and some even openly and explicitly threaten to destroy it. Two relevant examples are the non-participation of Israel in its natural geographical regional group in the IAEA, i.e. MESA, as well as the non-functioning of the MESA regional group, to which Israel belongs by Treaty's definition, in the context of the CTBTO Preparatory Commission.

Israel has a strict export control legislation, overseen by the Ministry of Economy and Industry. The Israel Atomic Energy Commission has an advisory role, as well as the Ministry of Defense and the Foreign Ministry. Since 2004, Israel's export control regulations and legislation include relevant export control lists, including the trigger and dual use lists of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Israel maintains an interest to become a future Participating Government in the NSG, based on its non-proliferation credentials. It has not yet taken practical steps for this purpose. Israel's basic position has been that membership of non-NPT states in the NSG should be based on a criteria-based approach.

Israel's non-proliferation credentials are many, and include, *inter alia*, the following:

- Israel fully supports the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1540 and its extension Resolution 1977, and reports in accordance with their requirements.
- Israel endorsed the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) aimed to prevent nuclear smuggling.
- Israel signed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), is participating actively in the work of the PrepCom and its Provisional Technical Secretariat, and supports a moratorium on nuclear testing pending the entry into force of the Treaty.
- Israel has joined the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials (CPPNM) and its 2015 amendment.
- Israel signed the Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism.
- Israel participated in the Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) process. In the context of the NSS process, Israel joined a few initiatives and gift baskets, and submitted national progress reports. Israel is an active participant in the Nuclear Security Contact Group (NSCG).
- Israel joined the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT), and has actively participated in a variety of political and technical activities within the framework of its work plan. In 2010 Israel hosted a GICNT workshop on nuclear forensics and legal aspects.
- Israel has provided financial and in-kind contributions in the field of nuclear security, including to the IAEA Nuclear Security Fund, and is a member of the IAEA's Nuclear Security Guidance Committee (NSGC).
- Israel is registered in the IAEA's Response and Assistance Network—RANET.

- Israel is an adherent to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).
- Israel joined several IAEA conventions and codes of conduct in the field of nuclear safety and security, including nuclear emergency response. Examples include the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident, the Convention on Assistance in the Case of Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency, and the Codes of Conduct on the Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources, and the Safety of Research Reactors.
- Israel participates in the IAEA Illicit Trafficking Database (ITDB).
- Israel actively participates in the US Second Line of Defense Initiative, aimed at detecting radiological materials at its sea ports. Operational detection systems are installed in Israel's two major seaports.
- Israel actively participates in the IAEA Safety Standards Committees (NUSSC, RASSC, TRANSSC, WASSC), including the Commission on Safety Standards (CSS).
- The IAEA completed successfully an Integrated Nuclear Safety Assessment of Research Reactors (INSAAR) mission in Israel's IRR-1 in July 2013.

The presentation outlined five major non-proliferation challenges. The first major challenge relates to Iran's persistent strategic aspirations to acquire nuclear weapons, coupled with its ballistic missile program, terror support, and destabilizing regional behavior.

Iran's track record of concealment and engagement in weapons-related activities has been elaborated in the IAEA Director General's reports on the Possible Military Dimensions of Iran's Nuclear Program. It is important to note that those reports detailed many open issues that still remain until this day. The so-called "closure" of this file by the IAEA Board of Governors was merely a political act in order to pave the way for the nuclear deal, and not in any way a judgment made by the IAEA. Against this background, Israel stresses that Iran has not abandoned its strategic goal to acquire nuclear weapons. Israel therefore believes that Iran's decision to join the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, known as the JCPOA, is merely a tactical pause. In fact, the JCPOA does not block Iran's path to a nuclear bomb, but creates a path to Iran for having many atomic bombs, by allowing Iran to continue developing advanced centrifuges. This could also provide Iran with the potential and the capability to pursue a clandestine route to nuclear weapons in a short period of time using those advanced, more efficient, centrifuges. JCPOA "expiration" is around the corner. In a few years, there will be no limitations on Iran's nuclear program. This will allow Iran, for example, an industrial-size enrichment capability that could produce the necessary fissile material for dozens of atomic bombs in a very short time. Iran could therefore enrich more uranium to higher levels more quickly, thereby cutting to merely several weeks Iran's breakout time, i.e. the time it will take to accumulate sufficient fissile material for a nuclear weapon. On top of all the above, Iran constantly declares its intention, and explicitly threatens to destroy Israel (even in Hebrew letters on its ballistic missiles). This demonstrates once

again the reason for Israel's perspective that places the Iranian nuclear program as the number one non-proliferation challenge, currently and in the future.

The second challenge concerns Syria's nuclear program. This is an unfinished business, since the IAEA's investigation has never been exhausted due to lack of cooperation from Syria. As is well known, Syria built jointly with the DPRK a clandestine nuclear reactor, which was revealed and destroyed in 2007. Had this nuclear reactor been completed and operated, it would have been ideally-suited to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons purposes. Needless to say, the construction of such a reactor was done in blatant violation of Syria's NPT safeguards obligations, as it should have been declared to the IAEA. In June 2011 The IAEA Board of Governors adopted resolution Gov/2011/41, which found that Syria's undeclared construction of a nuclear reactor at Dair Alzour, and failure to provide design information for the facility constituted, "...non-compliance with its obligations under its Safeguards Agreement with the Agency in the context of Article XII.C of the Agency's Statute." As indicated in the Director General's multiple reports, Syria has not engaged substantively with the Agency on the nature of the Dair Alzour site and other relevant locations. Israel views this matter as an urgent one in light of the presence and activities of non-state actors within Syria, and their eagerness to acquire knowledge, capabilities, and equipment, relevant for use in unconventional weapons.

The third non-proliferation challenge concerns potential proliferation from the DPRK to the Middle East. After its cooperation with Syria to build a secret nuclear reactor, Israel is concerned about future potential cooperation in the nuclear domain and other weapons of mass destruction with state and non-state actors in our region.

The fourth challenge in Israel's perspective concerns nuclear energy in the Middle East. In recent years there is a growing interest in the construction of nuclear research and power reactors in our region. There are three possible motivations for this growing interest: The first is a real need by regional countries for a cheaper and clean energy source. The second possible motivation relates to various domestic considerations, such as regimes' interest to talk about energy independence and diversity, including nuclear energy. This also relates to national prestige, to be among the few countries in the region who utilize nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Lastly, there is a perception of a need to introduce nuclear technology as part of a larger effort to engage with advanced technologies. The final, and most concerning motivation for the growing interest in nuclear energy is to create a potential for a future nuclear military program. In view of the region's negative track record concerning compliance with the obligations of the NPT, we must treat the risk of diversion as a realistic one.

Aside from the obvious risk of a potential diversion from peaceful facilities to military ones, additional concerns are related to safety and security matters, such as the increased risk of illicit trafficking of nuclear materials, as well as a concern that relates to internal stability in some of the countries in the region.

Having said all that, Israel does not object to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in the Middle East, conditioned upon:

- Its guaranteed exclusive use for peaceful purposes;
- Complete respect by countries that would like to embark on a nuclear energy program for relevant international non-proliferation obligations and commitments. It is Israel's strong view that joining the Additional Protocol is a prerequisite for the supply of nuclear technology to new countries.
- Fuel cycle technologies, which are THE proliferation risk, must absolutely be avoided. First, the suppliers should avoid the sale of any such technologies to new countries. Second, regional countries themselves must commit not to build or purchase such technologies as a condition for the supply of nuclear reactors.
- Certain nuclear reactors should be supplied as a "black box", according to the BOO model (build-own-operate). By certain reactors we mean those that are more proliferation resistant (light water, low enrichment fueled reactors). In order to sustain a black box model, the supplier has to guarantee a life-time fuel supply. It is also necessary to agree in advance on solutions for spent fuel take-back.
- Finally, the buyer country must commit to adopt and implement international standards for nuclear safety and security.

The final major non-proliferation challenge in Israel's view generally concerns the presence and active involvement of non-state actors in our region, which pose a potential nuclear security threat. Non-state actors already pose a direct threat to Israel's national security, having been a victim of terrorist and rocket attacks against civilian population. Some regional non-state actors enjoy state support as they are actively supported, funded and trained by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Additionally, they possess a large number of rockets and missiles, which cover the entire territory of the State of Israel. Non-state actors' interest in getting access to non-conventional weapons is a serious threat and challenge in Israel's view. For its part, Israel has taken comprehensive measures to reduce the risk of theft or sabotage in its nuclear centers, as well as radiological materials used in medicine, industry and other sectors.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

