

Israel in Action: Spoiling the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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More should have been made about it last month, but the security patrons and aficionados heaved a sigh of relief more than despair when it concluded. Effectively, efforts to obtain a consensus document at the end of the UN Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty conference held between April 27 and May 22 were railroaded. The UK delegation suggested that there was only one key sticking point: that of the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

As a review in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* noted, "It came down to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada supporting Israel's position on a conference to pursue a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction." [1] The 2010 final document had demanded that a conference be convened on the subject of the zone prior to the end of 2012, to be hosted in Finland with the facilitator Jaakko Laajava. So much for that.

Such reviews, which come every five years, tend to be ceremonial gestures of box ticking and smug denial. They focus, ostensibly, on assessing the progress made towards halting the proliferation of nuclear weapons; provide states complying with the provisions of the treaty access to non-weaponised nuclear technology; and, rather dreamily, the efforts of nuclear weapons disarmament on the part of the Permanent Five (P5) states.

Those fascinated by the dynamics of the nuclear club see the NPT as a successful document, one that has 191 signatories and has stalled the creation of more nuclear states. Once the atomic genie was unleashed in August 1945 with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the spectre of total nuclearisation became all too real. But getting countries on board the regime of non-proliferation has entailed a rather empty promise as outlined by Article VI of the Treaty. Not developing nuclear weapons on the part of 186 states was bought by the assurance that the nuclear club would dismantle their arsenals.

The non-nuclear states have over the years found the exchange unsatisfactory. The P5 continue going about wistfully refusing to engage in serious dismantling. The old logic of refusal prevails, and with just under 16,000 nuclear weapons available at the push of a trigger, this balance of terror is something that established nuclear states would not do without. If one has them, the rest have to.

All that seemed to transpire at this conference was a desperate attempt to keep an ill patient afloat. It reached an absurd point where a skeletal, poor document of 184 paragraphs was backed by a majority of delegates for no other reason than there was no other alternative. Austria's representative, speaking for over 20 signatories of the Austrian

Pledge on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, noted continuing legal deficiencies in the quest for disarmament. But even that creation, with severely diluted language about disarmament, was rejected by the US, Britain and Canada.

Israel's role as a spoiler was vital. Being itself outside the NPT framework, it has manipulated it with a degree of determined ruthlessness. Its official stance, which neither affirms or denies its nuclear stockpile, suggests how singular approaches will be tolerated.

The P5 states have given assurances over the years that a Middle East WMD Free Zone was on the cards. At the very least, a conference has been mooted to discuss its creation. The proposed text suggested that the UN Secretary-General convene the conference by March 2016.

Non-aligned countries, and Arab states, have seen promise in such a move. Israel has not. At the UN conference, it was Israel's belligerent position that prevailed. Outside the nuclear state system while being simultaneously of it, Israel was being the vigilante setting up rules it wished everyone else to follow bar its own.

It made the South African head of delegation indignant, observing how, "The failure on the Middle East leaves us in a perverse situation [in which] a state that is outside the Treaty has expectations of us and expects us to play by the rules it will not play by and be subjected to scrutiny it will not subject itself to." [2]

The rejecting states would have none of it. It was they who were in the right. The speaker for the Canadian delegation claimed that the document was being imposed on all, including Israel. The US delegate speaker suggested that the language used was not compatible with Washington's policies - this, despite polling showing that a majority of Americans would wish Israel's clandestine program to come under the umbrella of inspections. [3] As for Britain, it was "this issue [the WMD Free Zone] and this issue alone [that] was the stumbling block." [4]

Delegates familiar with their history of the NPT noted that its indefinite extension was only bought because of the 1995 resolution on a Middle East WMD Free Zone. Egypt's delegation was particularly vocal on that score, while the Tunisian delegate insisted that the resolution continued to hold force.

For all that, the singular stance of Israel, one that its allies took note of, doomed an already deficient review document to oblivion. The NPT will simply going on being a shadow of itself, degenerating, as the South African delegate observed, "into minority rule - as in apartheid-era South Africa - where the will of the few reigned supreme over the majority."

Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

Notes

[1] <http://thebulletin.org/npt-review-conference-no-outcome-document-better-weak-one8366>

[2] <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/dc3561.doc.htm>

[3] <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/poll-israels-nuclear-weapons-program--should-be-acknowledged-and-inspected-300095382.html>

[4] <http://cpr.unu.edu/why-the-2015-npt-review-conference-fell-apart.html>

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