

# Nuclear-Weapons-Free Middle East: Dismantling Israel's Nuclear Arsenal

By [Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East](#)

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Montreal – On May 5, the US joined the four other permanent members of the UN Security Council – China, France, Russia and the UK – in reaffirming a commitment to fully implement a 1995 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) resolution that would establish the Middle East as a region free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)-including, presumably, nuclear weapons. The reaffirmation was made at the 2010 NPT review conference. Just days before, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had expressed concern that the Middle East “may present the greatest threat of nuclear proliferation in the world today,” and said that the Obama administration is “prepared to support practical measures” that will help establish the region as a WMD-free zone. However, she also said that due to “the lack of a comprehensive regional peace and concerns about some countries’ compliance with NPT safeguards, the conditions for such a zone do not yet exist.”

While most western media outlets have been focussing on Iran’s nuclear energy programme and the possibility that Iran may intend to develop nuclear weapons capability, questions have also again arisen about Israel’s nuclear arsenal, estimated at 16 to 200 warheads – enough to destroy the region. Israel has never publicly admitted that it has nuclear weapons, but it has also refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Egypt and 17 other Arab countries now want Israeli nuclear weapons capability to be discussed at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) board meeting in June. All of the Arab states have signed the NPT and want Israel to do the same. Israel says it will not do so prior to a comprehensive regional peace agreement. It argues that without one it needs the ambiguity about its nuclear weapons capability as a deterrent. In a May 11 interview with CBC’s The Current, Arab League disarmament director Vael al-Assad noted that Israel’s position is an invitation to the Arab countries to engage in a regional nuclear arms race.

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) welcomes UN Security Council permanent members’ commitment to making the Middle East nuclear weapons-free. CJPME also urges the Canadian government to encourage Israel to reconsider the utility of its nuclear weapons. “Despite the fact that Israel’s nuclear capability is an open secret, it has never deterred the real threats to Israel’s security – for example, suicide bombings and rockets from southern Lebanon and Gaza,” notes CJPME President Thomas Woodley. “Israel’s nuclear status hampers efforts to negotiate with states in the region in the pursuit of a nuclear-free zone,” he notes.

CJPME also urged Canada to facilitate the initiation of formal negotiations of a Middle East NPT. “Reaching final agreements on transparent verification measures and other elements

of a legally-binding agreement will take years, but initiating such negotiations could have an immediate calming effect in the region,” Woodley comments. “Canadians want their government to contribute to peace and development rather than turmoil in the Middle East, and to do that Canada must hold all countries in the region to the same standard – be it regarding respect for human rights and international law, or signing the NPT,” he added.

*Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) is a non-profit and secular organization bringing together men and women of all backgrounds who labour to see justice and peace take root again in the Middle East. Its mission is to empower decision-makers to view all sides with fairness and to promote the equitable and sustainable development of the region.*

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