
Correspondence

The Middle East Resolution

To the Editor:

In his viewpoint, “The 2000 NPT Review Conference” (*The Nonproliferation Review*, Spring 2000), Tariq Rauf is critical of the United States for its “refusal to accept any compromise language on the Middle East” during the 1998 and 1999 PrepComs. He argues that American policy was inconsistent with “the crucial fact” that during the 1995 Review and Extension Conference (NP-TREC), the United States “cleared” the Middle East Resolution “with Israel before the document was adopted....”

The implication that Israel accepted the terms of the 1995 Middle East Resolution, and thus, the United States is free to support efforts aimed at coercing Israel into accepting the NPT, is misleading. While Israeli officials in Jerusalem (as a non-signatory, Israel was not represented during the conference) were generally informed of American policies regarding the Middle East Resolution during the 1995 NP-TREC, this does not indicate Israeli agreement. The US initiative in which the three NPT depository states acted as co-sponsors of this resolution, thereby elevating its importance, was unexpected. (These events are examined in detail in my article, “Middle East Peace and the NPT Extension Decision,” *The Nonproliferation Review*, Fall 1996).

Substantively, the US government’s policies are based on the realization that the Israeli position on the NPT, including the 1995 Resolution, results from geopolitical realities, and is not subject to negotiation. For decades, Israeli officials have declared that they “cannot and will not” abandon the nuclear deterrent option until the existential threats in the region are eliminated. Washington understands that sanctions or political isolation will not change the Israeli position, and are counterproductive.

The US government’s policies on this issue were and continue to be extremely important in the context of bilateral relations and the Middle East peace process. The United States has encouraged Israel to take significant risks in these negotiations, while pledging to act as security guarantor. In the 1998 Memorandum of Agreement, the United States explicitly pledged to protect the Israeli defense and deterrent capability. Thus, the US rejection of efforts to punish Israel, as proposed in the 1998 and 1999 PrepComs, was consistent with these commitments.

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To the Editor:

Professor Gerald Steinberg has raised some interesting questions regarding my references to the “Resolution on the Middle East,” co-sponsored by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia, and adopted without a vote at the 1995 NP-TREC. I fully stand by my comment that the United States had informed and cleared the Middle East Resolution with Israel prior to its sponsorship by the United States. Indeed, this was not unusual, as it is quite well known that Washington coordinates closely (and routinely) with Tel Aviv on issues that pertain to Israel’s (undeclared) nuclear weapon program and to its unsafeguarded nuclear facilities and activities, not only at NPT fora, but also at the IAEA and the UN General Assembly. Such a “nuclear” dialogue has taken place for more than three decades, and it took place not only during the 1998 and 1999 sessions of the NPT PrepCom but also during the recently concluded 2000 NPT Review Conference, where the United

States finally accepted formal (and gentle) language effectively “singling” out Israel in the context of the Middle East. The precise wording was: “The Conference welcomes the accession of these states and reaffirms the importance of Israel’s accession to the NPT and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards, in realizing the goal of universal adherence to the Treaty in the Middle East.”

In effect, the United States’ global nuclear nonproliferation policy (including its internationally legally binding obligations under the NPT) is directly pitted against its bilateral security arrangements with Israel. On the one hand, the United States is committed to supporting and strengthening the global nuclear nonproliferation norm. On the other hand, it is faced with the contradiction of “condoning” Israel’s nuclear weapon proliferation, by opposing the inclusion of calls on Israel to sign the NPT and to accept IAEA safeguards that have been advanced by Egypt (and other Arab and non-aligned countries). This apparently contradictory policy changed on May 19, 2000, when the United States accepted the text noted in the preceding paragraph.

To my knowledge, there was no attempt to “punish” Israel as claimed by Professor Steinberg. What Egypt and others were calling for was the ending of all nuclear cooperation with Israel in the absence of Israel’s accession to the NPT and acceptance of IAEA safeguards. This included the prohibition of visits by Israeli scientists to nuclear weapons laboratories, and resembled similar restrictions on nuclear cooperation with, and prohibitions on scientists from, India and Pakistan.

The result of the US double-standard regarding Israel was the perception that: (1) the United States condoned nuclear proliferation by Israel while promoting nonproliferation elsewhere—i.e., that the United States accepted the nuclear proliferation of an ally in a region of conflict, thus setting a bad precedent; (2) the US calls on India and Pakistan to join the NPT were thus not credible; (3) the United States might not be living up to its nonproliferation obligations under the NPT (Article I); and (4) the US policy could provide possible justification for other countries in the Middle East to develop their own nuclear weapon capabilities (in violation of the NPT).

The Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference has, for the first time in an NPT context, provided direct reference to Israel’s non-accession to the

NPT and its refusal to place its nuclear facilities and activities under IAEA safeguards. Will this bring about Israeli accession to the NPT? Probably not, but it does highlight Israel’s non-acceptance of the NPT and IAEA safeguards and commits all NPT parties, including the United States, to the Middle East Resolution. This resolution *inter alia* calls for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone and a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in that region, and for all states in the region “...to accede to the Treaty as soon as possible and to place their nuclear facilities under full-scope International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards....”

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