



THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRST COMMITTEE

DISARMAMENT & INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

PURVIEW OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRST COMMITTEE

The General Assembly First Committee addresses the disarmament of conventional weapons, weapons of mass destruction and related international security questions. The First Committee makes recommendations on the regulations of these weapons as they relate to international peace and security. The First Committee does not address legal issues surrounding weapons possession or control complex peace and security issues addressed by the Security Council. For more information concerning the purview of the UN's General Assembly as a whole, see page 25.

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ESTABLISHMENT OF A NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE ZONE IN THE REGION OF THE MIDDLE EAST

No single technology in mankind's development has brought with it a greater existential threat than nuclear weapons. With some eighteen thousand warheads estimated in global stockpiles, the world remains only one launch away from destruction. From the United Nations' very beginning, the international community has struggled with balancing the danger of these weapons with access to the technology and the energy nuclear fission can provide. One tool used by the international community has been the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZ), a geographical group of Member States that have renounced nuclear weapons technology, maintain no such weapons and have established a system of verification and monitoring.

The international community, fearing what the uncontrolled expansion of nuclear weapons could herald, promotes nuclear non-proliferation as a central element of ensuring international peace and stability. The goal of a NWFZ is to avert regional nuclear proliferation and encourage global disarmament. The first NWFZ was created by the Antarctic Treaty in 1959. The treaty forbade the stationing of nuclear weapons and waste in the Antarctic while also outlawing testing in the area. Latin America followed, establishing its own NWFZ with the Treaty of Tlatelolco in 1967. New clauses in the Treaty of Tlatelolco prohibited States Parties possessing nuclear weapons from stationing them within the area and prohibited Parties from using or threatening the use of nuclear weapons against other Parties.

The broader international effort toward addressing the nuclear threat saw another success when the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) entered into force in 1970. The treaty is intended to limit the expansion of nuclear weapon technology while ensuring that states have the continued right to pursue and safely use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. The NPT created the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to oversee safeguards and confidence-building measures and to implement verification measures. Today, NWFZ treaties cover Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Africa and Central Asia. The creation of an NWFZ in the Middle East would bring the region into the regime of existing NWFZ treaties and diminish the threat of nuclear war within the region.

A NWFZ in the Middle East was first proposed in 1962, and the General Assembly passed the first resolution endorsing the concept in 1974. Little progress was made over the next 35 years as actors in the region struggled to overcome conflict and mistrust. The 1990s saw a spurt of action as Egypt and Israel led an effort to renew talks. Instead of focusing on just nuclear weapons, States in the region aimed for a more comprehensive disarmament, including all forms of weapons of mass destruction. Talks stalled and then ultimately broke up in 1995.

Currently, the United Nations continues to encourage peaceful talks between States of the Middle East regarding creating an NWFZ. In 2010, the parties to the NPT asked the Secretary-General to consult with States in the region to encourage a 2012 NWFZ conference. Unfortunately, Member States could not agree to an agenda for the conference and it was ultimately abandoned. On 11 December, the General Assembly once again adopted a resolution for the establishment of a nuclear-free-weapon zone in the Middle East. In the resolution, the General Assembly emphasized the need for action based on reciprocity between States, implying a request for increased trust and civil discourse. It also asked for oversight from the IAEA, which would better enable the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. As the international community's center for coordination in the nuclear field, the IAEA would play an important role in both verifying the NWFZ and in supporting transfer of nuclear technology for peaceful uses, such as energy production. Unfortunately, the IAEA has limited standing in the region, as it struggles to engage with uncooperative governments suspicious of its actual mission, its staff and their motives.

Despite the broad consensus of Member States in the region and the international community, there are clearly challenges surrounding the creation of a Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone. Historical geopolitical struggles, exacerbated by fears of nuclear proliferation in the region, continually fuel a state of confrontation. A lack of transparency by multiple states in the region compounds the issues while further diminishing trust amongst the parties. The 2003 conflict in Iraq, its aftermath, and the Arab Spring have further roiled the region, with several changes in government, a fluctuating balance of power in the region and several active proxy wars.

Some States believe that nuclear weapons and the deterrence they bring are vital to their safety, especially if other regional powers already possess or are developing nuclear weapons. At the same time, removing the risk of nuclear weapons in an already volatile region could lead to increased stability and peace in the region. In order to proceed toward an NWFZ, Member States will need to, in effect, restart the dialogue with Member States and intergovernmental organizations in the region. Trust is essential for moving forward with a treaty. IAEA safeguards and confidence-building measures could be of critical assistance in increasing trust. States have previously disagreed about whether the safeguards should be implemented before or after a NWFZ treaty. With high levels of distrust, the General Assembly could work with States in the region to design and implement a confidence-building program that helps reduce tensions. Such an agreement can only succeed if the General Assembly considers what steps would allow



regional actors to disavow the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons. Achieving these foundational steps while minimizing geopolitical tensions in the region is difficult, but the threat of nuclear proliferation demands the effort.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- What steps can be taken to improve trust among regional actors and between States in the region and the IAEA?
- Can transparency and regular inspection of nuclear programs improve trust in the region?
- How can the international community ensure that States in the region have safe access to nuclear technology for peaceful use?
- What should the geographical scope of an NWFZ agreement in the Middle East be? What transparency and confidence-building measures should be included in a treaty?

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PROBLEMS ARISING FROM THE ACCUMULATION OF CONVENTIONAL AMMUNITION STOCKPILES IN SURPLUS

Disarmament—the reduction, limitation or abolition of weapons—has long been a goal for the United Nations. Its approach has grown more comprehensive over time, and includes efforts aimed at both nuclear and conventional disarmament. After the end of the Cold War, with the de-escalation in tensions between the United States and the former Soviet Union, the proliferation of new States, and the existence of enormous stockpiles of conventional weapons, the problem of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW) became paramount as these weapons fueled violent conflicts the world over. Because of their mobility and relative ease of use and maintenance, small arms remain the weapons of choice in many of the world's conflicts, and their proliferation can quickly escalate violence between armed groups (including military forces) and threaten population security. Weapons themselves were long the focus of disarmament, but the ordnance or ammunition is also an important part of the disarmament regime.

Ammunition stockpiles, comprised of bullets for SALW, missiles, rockets, landmines and other explosive devices, pose specific problems distinct from the larger issues surrounding disarmament. For example, when not stored properly, conventional ammunition stockpiles create a significant risk of unplanned explosions and unintentional discharges that endanger military personnel, civilian workers and surrounding communities. Between 2000 and 2009, there were 289 documented explosions, causing 3,486 fatalities and 4,427 significant injuries; the fatalities accounted for approximately 21 percent of the global fatalities due to landmines and unexploded ordnance worldwide. In light of these incidents, the need for UN action on the issue was evident. Furthermore, poorly-guarded and maintained ammunition stockpiles provide ample opportunity for the diversion of ammunition to violent groups and individuals, including gangs, terrorist organizations, criminal syndicates and individual criminals.

After receiving a report from a group of experts, which acknowledged the significant financial and technical challenges of surplus ammunition stockpile management in 2008, the UN organized a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE or Group) on the subject to provide recommendations on possible courses of action. The primary substantive notes of the GGE report were the recognition of a lack of technical guidance regarding stockpile management and an emphasis on the fact that effective stockpile management must be comprehensive—including categorizing ammunition, building accounting systems to identify surplus, establishing procedures to ensure safe handling, enhancing physical security systems and developing testing procedures to assess stability and reliability. The Group recommended the development of appropriate technical guidelines. The General Assembly endorsed the Report in 2008 and encouraged States to implement its recommendations.

Disarmament represents a significant area of parallel lines of effort within the United Nations. The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) is responsible for tracking and coordinating disarmament efforts across UN bodies and technical agencies. The General Assembly First Committee is concerned with disarmament and related international security issues and its resolutions on the topic have focused on developing comprehensive,



integrated, and pragmatic approaches to the problem. Previous resolutions also encouraged States to voluntarily assess whether their conventional ammunition stockpiles could be considered in surplus and the risks associated with continuing to store the ammunition or destroy it. States must determine what comprises a surplus, though factors to consider include the country's security situation, the size of the military, and international commitments, such as peacekeeping. The resolution also encouraged international, regional and subregional cooperation to improve ammunition stockpile management and coordination efforts to prevent illicit trafficking in ammunition. The First Committee also urged coordination with the UNODA and the involvement of the Mine Action Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in these matters.

To date, the most significant achievements in the area of conventional weapons ammunition disarmament have been with the establishment of the UN SaferGuard programme in 2011 and the establishment and implementation of the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG). Currently, there are twelve published guidelines regarding the storage and detonation of surplus ammunition, ranging from risk management to transporting ammunition to the destruction of surplus ammunition. The IATG are meant to assist States in establishing national standards and Standard Operating Procedures by establishing principles for ammunition stockpile management, technical references and scientific data about explosives; they do not define detailed or prescriptive requirements for stockpile management. All Member States have welcomed the guidelines, and governments interested in implementing the guidelines and increasing the security of their stockpiles are encouraged to contact the SaferGuard programme.

Regional and subregional disarmament programs, such as the Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC) have had some success in helping interested States reduce their surplus ammunition stockpiles through financial and technical assistance and by providing access to equipment such as the Small Arms Ammunition Burning Tanks (SAABT), which would be prohibitively expensive for many nations. Other regional organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe have also established regional guidelines for conventional ammunition stockpile management.

While the Technical Guidelines deal directly with ammunition stockpiles, the broader program of disarmament is of some import as well. The United Nations along with governments, international and regional organizations, civil society, and the private sector, has developed International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS). The ISACS are used by the more than twenty UN organizations that make up the Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) whose job it is to coordinate and support implementation efforts on the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, the International Tracing Instrument, and the United Nations Firearms Protocol. To date, issues resulting from surplus ammunition stockpiles have not been addressed directly in these bodies; this is one area in which increased coordination may be both desirable and possible.

Though the IATG and the SaferGuard programme have made significant gains, the crux of the problem of surplus ammunition stockpiles still exists. Ammunition stockpiles are not managed

internationally and are not subject to the same scrutiny as weapons stockpiles or the transfer of SALW among armed groups. The management and security of ammunition stockpiles has existed as a secondary concern to other disarmament programs, rather than being integrated into efforts at more general conventional disarmament. While regional and subregional frameworks to address this issue operate in conjunction with frameworks to combat illicit arms trafficking, progress is still hampered by budgetary constraints of states and technical knowledge. Member States may be reluctant to destroy surplus ammunition stockpiles in order to maintain their defense posture and readiness, and they may have difficulty in safely storing and guarding the stockpiles because doing so is expensive and requires significant technical expertise. The primary challenges for the United Nations remain how to encourage the adoption of best practices for ammunition stockpile management, how to build capacity for States that wish to secure and manage their ammunition stockpiles over the full life of the ammunition, and how best to monitor compliance with national, subregional, regional and international standards.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- How can the international community encourage the adoption of best practices for ammunition stockpile management, such as those laid out by the IATG?
- How can the United Nations encourage international, regional, and subregional frameworks and organizations to cooperate and coordinate action on the issue of surplus ammunition?
- What further action is needed to tie issues related to surplus conventional ammunition stockpiles to UN action more broadly related to SALW disarmament?

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