

# **Middle East and the Dialogue on Nuclear Disarmament: A European Approach**

Middle East Dialogue 2022:  
Towards an Israeli-Palestinian Settlement

**Adérito R. Vicente**

*Department of Political and Social Sciences (SPS), European University Institute*  
[aderito.vicente@eui.eu](mailto:aderito.vicente@eui.eu)

## **Abstract**

Negotiations on the establishment of a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (ME WMDFZ) and their means of delivery has long been a common goal of all the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) states parties and regional states. However, after more than three decades of preliminary negotiations, the ME WMDFZ process reached its critical phase. This presentation focuses on the current dialogue and diplomatic efforts to negotiate a zone free of nuclear weapons. As such, I examine the key efforts that different parties (namely the European Union) had taken to promote a dialogue on nuclear disarmament in the region, but I also evaluate the factors that obstruct the negotiations for the establishment of a ME WMDFZ.

I argue that opportunities to negotiate a zone free of nuclear weapons and ME WMDFZ can learn a great deal from the successful negotiation of other nuclear weapons free zones (NWFZs) and to some extent the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Nonetheless, it is crucial to capture the nuances of a dialogue on nuclear disarmament in the region and the complexity of the ME WMDFZ issue. In this context, I acknowledge that there are conflicting goals and national security interests, rivalry (e.g., Iran versus Saudi Arabia), endemic mistrust, and ongoing tensions in the region (e.g., Israeli-Palestinian conflict). In addition, I recognize that there are divergent views in the region about the causes of nuclear proliferation, the best approaches (comprehensive approach or through gradual measures) and policies to address those causes and, by extension, whether the ME WMDFZ is the most proper solution to promote nuclear disarmament in the region.

As a result, I claim that the success of this enterprise will depend largely on how to overcome the aforementioned constraints and so on which concrete solutions could be implemented and operationalized towards a NWFZ in the Middle East. Thus, based on my findings, I propose the following concrete efforts. First, to promote a friendly international environment and cooperation

between major powers. Second, to foster inclusive dialogue among experts and policymakers on regional security issues, which in turn could contribute to ongoing multilateral processes (e.g., NPT Review Conference). Third, while a future NWFZ in the Middle East cannot be imposed from the outside, it is relevant to find a trusted party that would have the authority to propose ideas and function as a mediator (e.g., the EU). Fourth, to preserve the successful ideas from earlier diplomatic and political work that can inform, and be used as elements in, future negotiations. Fifth, the participation of all key states is essential, and these states must have a shared interest, not just in the ultimate goal but also in how to achieve a NWFZ. And, ultimately, to launch confidence-building measures (CBMs) among all parties, including states, nonstate actors and the civil society from the Middle East.

**Keywords:** dialogue, disarmament, European Union, NPT, nuclear weapon free zones, Middle East