U.S. Blocks NPT Conference Statement Over Israeli Objections

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The United States blocked the issuing of a concluding statement for the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference that closed Friday night in New York, following [objections voiced by Israel](http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.657683).

The balanced final draft of the concluding statement was expected to task the UN secretary general with convening an international conference on making the Middle East a nuclear weapons-free zone by March 2016. Israel objected to the deadline.

According to the U.S. the statement wasn't issued because the members were unable to overcome disagreements on an atomic weapons ban for the Middle East. The super-power blamed Egypt.

After four weeks of negotiations at the United Nations on ways to improve compliance with the pact, there was no consensus among its 191 signatories. U.S. Under Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller announced there was "no agreement" and accused some countries of undermining the negotiations.

Gottemoeller did not say which nations had tried to "cynically manipulate" the conference, though she accused Egypt and other Arab states of bringing "unrealistic and unworkable conditions" to the negotiations.

A senior Western diplomat was more blunt: "Egypt wrecked the conference. ... Egypt overshot the runway and has prevented the region from moving closer to a region free of (weapons of mass destruction)."

Egypt denied trying to wreck the conference.

The U.S. concerns were echoed by Canada and Britain. Cairo's top delegate, Assistant Foreign Minister Hashim Badr, blamed Washington, London and Ottawa for the failure to achieve consensus, saying it was a "sad day for the NPT."

Last month, Egypt, backed by other Arab and non-aligned states, proposed that UN.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon convene a regional conference on banning weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as called for at the 2010 NPT review. The conference would be with or without Israel's participation, without agreement on an agenda and with no discussion of regional security issues.

Those conditions are unacceptable to Israel and Washington.

Decisions at NPT review conferences, which are held every five years, are made by consensus.

Israel neither confirms nor denies the widespread assumption that it controls the Middle East's only nuclear arsenal. Israel, which has never joined the NPT, agreed to take part in the review meeting as an observer, ending a 20-year absence.

The call for a 2012 conference on a regional WMD ban, approved at the 2010 NPT review meeting, infuriated Israel. But diplomats said Israel eventually agreed to attend planning meetings. The 2012 conference never took place, which annoyed Egypt and other Arab states.

Egypt's proposals, Western diplomats say, were intended to focus attention on Israel. Washington and Israel say Iran's nuclear program is the real regional threat.

Iran says its program is peaceful. It is negotiating with world powers to curb it in exchange for lifting sanctions.

Israel has said it would consider joining the NPT only once at peace with its Arab neighbors and Iran.

**Fears of a 'rerun' of 2010**

When the conference opened a month ago, Egypt submitted a proposal that would mandate holding the Mideast conference with or without Israeli agreement. Moreover, the Egyptian proposal would make Israel’s nuclear program the conference’s focus.

Israel, the United States and other countries objected strenuously to the Egyptian proposal. The Israeli position holds that such a conference should deal with all regional security problems, including missiles and terrorism, rather than the nuclear issue alone. Israel also demanded that any such conference be conditioned on all participating countries agreeing on the agenda.

Earlier this week, Spain, after consulting with Egypt, presented a compromise proposal that essentially rejected this Israeli condition, stating that if no consensus is reached on the agenda before December 2015, the UN secretary general will be empowered to decide whether to convene the conference, and on what terms.

Over the last few days, Jerusalem and Washington have held intensive talks in an effort to reach understandings on the issue. A senior Israeli official involved in the talks said that Thomas Countryman, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for international security and nonproliferation, has been in Israel since Tuesday, talking with officials from the Foreign Ministry, the National Security Council and the Israel Atomic Energy Commission.

The senior Israeli official said Israel feared a “rerun” of what happened at the last NPT Review Conference in 2010, when Egypt succeeded in forcing the U.S. to include a section in the concluding statement that addressed Israel’s nuclear capabilities and urged it to open all of its nuclear facilities to UN inspections. The 2010 statement also called for convening a conference on making the Middle East an area free of weapons of mass destruction within two years.

Israel was furious and accused the U.S. administration of reneging on its prior commitments to Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu then demanded “compensation” from Washington, and received it during a visit to the White House in July 2010, when U.S. President Barack Obama promised that there would be no change in American policy on Israel’s nuclear program and that Washington would not seek to undermine Israel’s policy of nuclear ambiguity.

Israel had the same concerns this time, too, the senior Israeli official said, It was feared that Washington’s desire for a concluding statement dealing with making the Middle East a WMD-free zone would lead the Americans to make concessions to Egypt that will undermine Israel’s security interests.

The U.S. administration rejected Israel’s fears. Bernadette Meehan, a spokesman for the U.S. National Security Council, said the language of the concluding statement hadn’t yet been finalized, and the U.S. would work to ensure that the final statement would satisfy both U.S. and Israeli interests.

“Both the United States and Israel support the creation of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East,” said Meehan. “We are working closely with our Israeli partners to advance our mutual interests, including preserving the NPT.“

“This Administration and this President do not break commitments to our Israeli partners,” she said.