

Panel 39: **Nuclear Politics in the Middle East: origins, transformations and challenges**

Saturday 19, 9-11.15, Room 1

Convenors: **Hassan Elbahtimy** (King's College London), **Paolo Foradori** (University of Trento)

Nuclear politics in the Middle East has long been an important item on the region's security agenda. Controversies surrounding the Israeli, Iranian, Iraqi and Libyan programmes (among others) have taken turns to ensure that, at any one point, the nuclear issue remained a pressing regional and international security issue. Proposals for the establishment of the Nuclear then Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone are yet to be fulfilled despite being in diplomatic circulation for more than four decades. Interest in nuclear technology for power generation has been between ebbs and flows complicating an already complex nuclear landscape. At a time of regional turmoil and geopolitical shifts, examining the nuclear dimension acquires added significance. This panel addresses, examines and assesses the ongoing transformations in regional nuclear politics. Significantly, three important transformations warrant a re-examination of the dynamics and future prospects of regional nuclear politics: the nuclear deal reached between Iran and the 6 great powers in July, failure to convene an international conference geared towards ridding the regions of weapons of mass destruction and finally renewed regional interest in developing nuclear power/civilian applications. Papers on this panel examine different aspects of the evolution, current practice and future prospects of nuclear politics in the Middle East.

Paper givers:

- 1) **Hassan Elbahtimy** (King's College London), *Nuclear Politics in the Middle East between continuity and change*

The Middle East is going through a period of significant political and strategic transformations. In different parts of the region, the foundation of the post-independence state are being challenged. Conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen have exacerbated regional tensions and gave rise to proxy wars. Internationally, the US, the main balancer in the region, is increasingly disengaged after Iraq while Russia is increasingly presenting itself as a reliable ally and as a source of arms and nuclear technology. The impact of this evolving landscape is likely to be significant. These dynamics will likely shape regional politics and how the region relates to the outside powers for a long time. This paper specifically investigates how these transformations will influence regional nuclear politics. It will examine the dynamics and transformations of regional nuclear politics set in motion by all of the above factors. In doing that, it explores the role nuclear issues are likely to play in regional politics and how the region relates to the outside world. It also seeks to unpack the strategies of regional actors on the nuclear issue and discern their collective impact on the state of nuclear play in the region.

- 2) **Nanis A. Fahmy** (Cairo University), *The Role of Regional Organizations in Establishing Nuclear Weapons Free Zones: Arab League Case Study*

Regional organizations are a genuine part of the collective security system established by the UN Charter, which permits and encourages regional organizations to play a role in promoting and maintaining international peace and security. Regional organisations have played a key role in the establishment of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones (NWFZ), like in the case of the Organization of American States (OAS) for the creation of the NWFZ in Latin America, or the African Union for the NWFZ in the African continent. This paper will discuss the role of the Arab League in seeking to establish a NWFZ in the Middle East through decisions, committees and cooperation with the civil society. Despite the many difficulties and obstacles in the establishment of a NWFZ in such a complex region, it will be argued that a Middle East free-zone could open doors for cooperation and security dialogue among the states of the region, and thereby induce an atmosphere of trust that should help efforts towards actual peace.

3) **Simone Massi** (University of Turin), *The Balance of Power: Egypt's Challenge for a Sustainable Energy Balance*

During the last years Egypt is suffering a deep energy imbalance. The continuous increasing of population, the emerging of new critical issues on national politics and economy, and finally the long-term freezing of strategical decisions, affect several structural deficiencies. For all that reasons, the incumbent presidency is working on a brand new plan to achieve energy independence. Last November, Egypt signed a ten-year agreement for building its first nuclear power plant in El Dabaa, with the cooperation of a new partner: Russia. How the new energy strategy of president al-Sisi is part of the regional context? Can we imagine a nuclear-equipped Egypt, while it's losing control on portions of its territory, such as the Sinai Peninsula? The key aim of this paper is to foster understanding of the significance of this new energy policy in relation to internal and external pressures that Egypt faces.

4) **Steven Miller** (Harvard University), *After the Iran Nuclear Deal: Implications of the JCPOA*

The negotiations to reach the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1 were protracted and difficult but the signing of the agreement was just the beginning of a phase that is intended to last at least fifteen years, a phase that will be filled with challenges. One core challenge will be the implementation and verification of the agreement itself; problems and disagreements are sure to arise and the mechanisms for coping with such issues are uncertain and untested. But the agreement has wider regional and international implications as well. For the United States, there will be the challenge of managing a more mixed relationship with Iran, in which contention and hostility remain but areas of cooperation are possible. Within the region, key players such as Israel and Saudi Arabia see their interests dramatically and adversely affected by the Iran nuclear deal and seem inclined to take steps and pursue policies to neutralize the threat they see to their interests. More broadly, the implications of the Iran nuclear deal for the global nonproliferation regime are seriously debated. This paper will seek to address the implications of the Iran nuclear deal and to

explore how the fifteen year window can be utilized to ensure a benign outcome when the important provisions of the deal begin to expire.

5) **Ali Diskaya** (Central European University, Budapest), *Israel's Policy of Nuclear Ambiguity: Origins, Transformations and Challenges*

In 1967 Israel managed to secretly cross the nuclear threshold and become the Middle East's first and only nuclear-armed state. Over the years, Israel's strategy of complete secrecy has evolved into a unique policy of "nuclear ambiguity" (neither confirming nor denying the existence of nuclear weapons), providing the country with an existential nuclear deterrent while shielding it from growing international and domestic criticism. Within this context, this paper examines how the Israeli government manages to uphold its exceptional policy of nuclear ambiguity, both domestically and internationally. To address this question, the paper draws on interviews with Israeli politicians, journalists, academics, and anti-nuclear activists as well as on historical analysis of relevant secondary sources. While the main body of the paper is devoted to a thorough analysis of the evolution of Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity and the driving forces behind its success, the paper concludes by discussing the challenges Israel might face in the light of recent domestic, regional, and international developments.