

Playing Chess with Damocles

Rhianna Tyson, Reaching Critical Will

International relations have often been described as a complex game of chess, played on multiple boards simultaneously, wherein a decision on one board directly affects the strategies and opportunities on all the others.

Over the past week and a half that this PrepCom has been in session, the accuracy of this metaphor has been highlighted several times. First, the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) were given fresh impetus in their quest to frame the discussion on non-proliferation, rather than disarmament, when Security Council Resolution 1540 was passed last week. The resolution, as the *News in Review* has commented several times, struck a blow to the delicate balance between disarmament and nonproliferation by failing to reaffirm the intrinsic link between the two indivisible goals.

The multidimensional chess game was in full action yesterday at the UN as well, as the PrepCom devoted special time to Regional Issues while the “Quartet”- the UN, U.S., E.U., and Russia- met in a separate part of the building to discuss the tattered Road Map to peace in the Middle East.

Nearly a dozen States took the floor to call for Israel’s accession to the treaty - the main obstacle in the creation of a Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NWFZ) - and to reaffirm the urgency of universalization and the denuclearization of the volatile region. The United States, meanwhile, utilized the Special Time to once again accuse Iran of “serious violation of its NPT obligations.”

France, the only other Nuclear Weapon State to take the floor yesterday, heralded Security Council resolution 687 and the proposals from Egyptian President Mohammed Mubarak, and offered a “checklist” of conditions necessary to create a much needed “new regional security framework.” In order to achieve a NWFZ in the tumultuous region, France called for: an established dialogue amongst all parties; compliance with NPT commitments from the region’s States Parties; cessation of arms and delivery systems proliferation; strict adherence to the NPT, CWC, BTWC, and the CTBT; adoption of Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and the placement of all facilities under IAEA monitors; the elimination of existing stockpiles of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons as well as their means of delivery; and more.

It could be argued that had the 1995 Review and Extension Conference not adopted the resolution on the Middle East as part of the “Package of Decisions,” States Parties might not have been able to ascertain the indefinite extension that prolonged the treaty’s lifespan. Although the resolution has yet to be implemented, it remains, as Kuwait remarked yesterday, “an integral part” of the international disarmament and nonproliferation regime.

The absence of further decisions on the Middle East at the 2000 Review Conference was entirely due to the possibility of the 13 Practical Steps. In 2000, Non Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) in the Middle East were temporarily content to relegate the region to the back burner in exchange for the “unequivocal undertaking” by the NWS to disarm. Now that the NWS have clearly reneged on that diplomatic achievement, the NNWS are duly determined to reprioritize the Middle East as a front issue for the NPT at the next Review.

While the Quartet deliberates how to reconcile Israel’s proposed withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, States Parties trek back to their Missions to consider how the NPT can best address the crisis.

Neither framework is likely to discover a silver bullet in the next few days. But, as pawns and bishops scuttle across their separate boards, the nuclear sword of Damocles continues to loom over the Middle East and the entire world.

Read more *News in Review* at: <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/legal/npt/nirindex.html>.