Tackling the Status Quo in the Middle East
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I- Introduction

Inspired by the spirit of the dangers of nuclear proliferation and use of nuclear weapons testing whether atmospheric, underwater or underground as a hidden message or show of force and abiliuty to deter, the United Nations General Assembly convened to produce the *Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)* as a means to end nuclear weapons' testing. Despite the good intentions of the *CTBT*, almost 21 years have passed since its inception, and 8 countries (Annex 2 states) have yet to ratify the treaty for it to take effect. These countries are: the United States, China, Pakistan, India, North Korea, Iran, Israel and Egypt.

This paper has a particular interest in tackling the roots that led three Middle Eastern Annex II states, namely Egypt, Israel and Iran to delay the ratification of the CTBT. The three states have held hostage the CTBT ratification, and by extension its entry to force to mere political bargains based on cost-benefit approaches. None of which have any serious strategic reasons not to ratify the CTBT, however they linkage ratification to other issues, even issues outside the CTBT realm. The real challenge that faces the ratification of the CTBT (as well as the establishment of a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone MEWMDFZ) is the absence of **minimal favorable conditions**. These include mutual recognition, stability as well as multiple political, historical and technical issues

Medicine and diplomacy might share some components in common; both tend to diagnose and operate carefully on cases. The very same perspective can be utilized to analyze the current CTBT status quo. In medicine, the most important phase lies in identifying the symptoms on one side and the possible correlations of these symptoms with diseases. We can never have an accurate diagnosis based on symptoms. For example, headache, fever, fatigue and sneezing are flu symptoms, but having all these symptoms does not imply that the patient is with flu; he or she might be with asthma or acute sinusitis. The same thing is applied to the CTBT; we tend to tackle the symptoms and hope to put an end to the current the status quo (disease). Ergo, we can never reach to full recovery (CTBT ratification) through addressing the symptoms. Some the symptoms per country are listed as follows:

II- Symptoms of the Egyptian Position on the CTBT Ratification:
     A- The ambiguity of the Israeli nuclear, biological and chemical programs.

     B- Israel being no party to any of the major treaties governing the WMD nonproliferation such as the NPT, MTCR, BWTC, and CWC.[1]

     C- Egyptian sense of vulnerability resulted from an unbalanced balance of power after Egypt joined and ratified the NPT in 1981.[2]This sense of vulnerability is further

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[1] David Hafemeister, *Nuclear Proliferation and Terrorism in the Post 9/11 World* (California: Springer, 2016), 343.
[2] Gawdat Bahgat, "A Nuclear Armed Race in the Middle East: Myth or Reality?," Mediterranean Quarterly Vol.22, No. 22 (2011), 29.

deepened due to the Israeli development of more complicated delivery vehicles based on fire and forget such as the Jericho Missile variants.

III- Symptoms of the Israeli Position on the CTBT Ratification:

    A- The Iranian rejection to recognize the State of Israel.

    B- The refusal of Israel to link the NPT to the CTBT. This refusal is based on the endurance of the Israeli security reasoning. This very same reasoning led Israel to believe that a deterrent is necessary to compensate for "the small size of the State, lack of its strategic depth and its vulnerability to conventional and non-conventional attacks."[3]

    C- The Israeli skepticism about the full effectiveness of any of the nonproliferation treaties in restricting states capabilities in seeking WMD; especially, after the North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT in 2003.[4]

    D- The ambiguity of the Iranian Nuclear Program.

IV- Symptoms of the Iranian Position on the CTBT Ratification:

    A- The insistence of some countries to place Israel in the Middle East and South Asia group. According to the Iranian formal perspective, adding Israel to the MESA group is perceived as " imposing upon Iran a regime that is not deemed legitimate by the MESA".[5]

    B- The ambiguity of the Israeli Nuclear Program.

    C- The deeply rooted Iranian perception of deterrence as a justification for the expansion of the sphere of influence, and nukes as a symbol of colonialism; an impulse of the strong against the weak- synonymous with the arrogant oppressor (Mustakbariin) against those who are downtrodden (Mostazafiin). The Mustakbariin V.S. Mustazafiin rhetoric is one of the foundational aspects of the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979, and we have to consider the Iranian perception of Israel as a Mustakber (A Powerful Nuclear Oppressor) and the region as (the downtrodden). According to the very same rhetoric, Iran has an ideological obligation to oppose Mustakberin.[6]

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[3] Michael Handel, "The Evolution of Israeli Strategy: the Psychology of Insecurity and the Quest for Absolute Security," in *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States and War,* ed. William Murray et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 538-539.

[4] Anver Cohen, "Israel: Reconstructing a Black Box," in *Biological Warfare and Disarmament: New Problems/ New Perspectives,* ed. Susan Wright (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2002), 199.

[5] Baeidinejad, "Iran Concerned With Israel Grouping in Mideast, S Asia CTBT," *MEHR News Agency*, June 14, 2016. Accessed June 09, 2017, http://en.mehrnews.com/news/117347/Iran-concerned-with-Israel-grouping-in-Mideast-S-Asia-CTBT.

[6] David Patrickarakos, *Nuclear Iran: The Birth of an Atomic State* (New York & London: IBT Tauris, 2012)*,* 119.

V- Tackling the Status Quo

These were only some of symptoms that define the Middle Eastern Trios: Egypt, Israel and Iran's allergy to the CTBT ratification. If we diagnosed these symptoms, we will find that none has any interlinks with the CTBT in terms of the treaty's content or the treaty's main call – banning nuclear testing.

However, the three parities are involved in a zero-sum game, where each player's gain or loss of utility is exactly balanced by the losses or gains of other players. Moreover, each player is pretty aware of the zero-sum game and decided not to make any move to avoid losses. This defines the real core of the Middle Eastern trios allergy to the CTBT ratification; the real core has nothing to do with the CTBT either in content or context, yet it is the lack of trust and confidence among the three players. To unpuzzle this riddle and by extension put an end to this zero-sum game, we must provide the trios with confidence building measures that provide a suitable environment for a later CTBT ratification.

The paper proposes confidence-building measures based on a 2 + 1 + 1 scenario. In this scenario Egypt and Israel (2) have an opportunity jointly build a foundation for a status quo of mutual trust to defuse the diplomatic stagnant perception on the CTBT ratification that is based on the Israeli refusal to join the NPT due to the Israeli concept of maintaining last resort deterrence,[7] spread confidence to the neighboring Arab States (1), and eventually involve Iran (1).

There are plenty of opportunities to build a foundation of trust in the MENA region, starting at its core with the Egypt and Israel. Both countries can pursue win-win endeavors that change the status of the zero-sum game into a game of dependency, where each player is dependent on the other. However, to change the game basics from a zero-sum game into a game of dependency, **we will have to approach CBMs outside the CTBT arena to tackle these countries CTBT concerns, that are also outside the CTBT arena**. Starting with building the basic and primitive level of trust (survival), which is concerned with security and military issues. Egypt and Israel can militarily build trust through:

1- Mutual notification of maneuvers, alert exercises, mobilization drills, aircraft operations, flights near sensitive areas among other military activities, which might be misinterpreted.

2- Exchange of information either directly or through a third parties about military budget, unit locations and the major elements of the strategic and tactical doctrine.

3- Exchange of personnel as student or instructors at military academies, school and war colleges.

4- Inviting observers to maneuvers, exercises and out of garrison activities.

5- Jointly intensify the intelligence cooperation regarding counter-terrorism activities.

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[7] Zeev Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), 348.

A second step in the pyramid of confidence can be built upon mutual political gains; both Egypt and Israel can operate in a political harmony through win-win scenarios. The considerable Israeli influence in Ethiopia can be utilized to secure Egypt's share of the Nile Water from its source. This excellent gesture can help Israel to promote its political image in the eyes of the Egyptian government and the Egyptian people simultaneously. On the other hand, Egypt, as the diplomatic leader of the Arab World, can mediate between the Arab countries and Israel (given the joint guarantees and conditions), and using the need of mutual cooperation and survival dependency against common threats such as the ISIS and other internationally recognized terrorist organizations i.e. Hezbulloh, El-Qaeda, etc.

Building both military and political confidence between the Arab States and Israel can pave the way for further positive outcomes beyond expectations. **Addressing both the military and political concerns of Egypt and the Arab States on one side, and Israel on the other can partially defuse the zero-sum game between the Arab region and Israel**. Additionally, it can alter the Israeli perception of their need of a last resort deterrence and mutual CTBT ratification between Egypt and Israel plus the spread of IMS across the region.

Should Israel and Egypt ratify the CTBT with the blessing of the Arab neighboring states, Iran will find no other option but to ratify the treaty; otherwise, the cost of delaying the ratification of the CTBT for Iran will be considerably high in terms of regional isolation and international skepticism.

VI- Why 2+1+1?

The reason this paper approached the Middle Eastern trios through a 2+1+1 is to establish CBMs between Egypt and Israel as the two countries have at least the minimal favorable conditions for negotiations that are mutual recognition and representation. On the contrary, Iran and Israel lack this very same minimal condition. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that Egypt has any the intention to negotiate with Iran one on one or through a third party without the consensus of the Arab world; especially the gulf region. These regional basics force us to move in one narrow alley that starts with Egypt and Israel, and then approach the Arab region and ultimately end with Iran.

VII- Conclusion:

This paper does not purport that these solutions are abundant or easily achieved. Nor does this paper assume that any or all of the solutions are benefits proposed take into consideration the vast and many variables that decision makers must contemplate when considering such solutions. However, the paper claims to open further possibilities previously not considered, that may be brought to the attention of said decision makers. It is the basis of this paper that while not all solutions may be considered, lest not approved, there is still no possibility too small or too impossible to recommend in the interest of a comprehensive ban on nuclear testing.

VIII- Bibliography

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