

Current Affairs (Nuclear Issue)

Q In the Light of the Iran - Israel tensions, analyse how Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East threatens the global non-proliferation regime. Suggest measures to prevent escalation.

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Current Affairs (Nuclear Issues):

2) In the light of the Iran-Israel tensions, analyse how nuclear proliferation in the Middle East threatens the global non-proliferation regime. Suggest measures to prevent escalation?

Intro

The Middle East has long been one of the most unstable regions in the world, plagued by political rivalries, sectarian tensions, and unresolved territorial disputes. Countries in the region have experienced repeated conflicts, both within and across borders, which have often drawn in external powers and complicated efforts for peace. In this volatile environment, the issue of nuclear weapons has become a major concern for global security.

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Iran and Israel are at the centre of this Nuclear tension. Israel is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons, though it has never confirmed them officially, while Iran's nuclear program has sparked international controversy and uncertainty. The rivalry between these two countries is more than just political; it carries the risk of triggering a dangerous arms race. If one side develops or expands its nuclear capability, it could encourage other countries in the region to do the same, further destabilizing the Middle East.

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This situation also threatens the global non-proliferation framework, particularly the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and promote peaceful nuclear energy. The Iran-Israel tension demonstrates how regional conflicts can challenge international agreements and highlights the difficulty of enforcing non-proliferation in politically sensitive areas.

In short, the nuclear rivalry in the Middle East is not just a regional issue but a global concern, with potential consequences for international peace and security.

Background of Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East:

1- Israel's Nuclear Ambiguity:-

- Israel follows a policy of "nuclear opacity" (amimut), and it does not openly admit or deny having nuclear weapons.
- Intelligence reports suggest it possesses 80-200 nuclear warheads, developed outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This ambiguity allows Israel to deter regional rivals while avoiding international sanctions. The policy strengthens its security posture but also raises concerns about Middle East nuclear proliferation.
- Israel views its undeclared nuclear ability for deterring hostile neighbours, especially after the wars of 1948, 1967 and 1973.

2- Iran's Nuclear Program:-

- Iran, a signatory to the NPT, insists that its nuclear program is peaceful and geared towards energy production.
- However, concerns about uranium enrichment levels and ballistic missile development fuel suspicions of weaponisation.
- The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) temporarily limited Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief. Yet, the US withdrawal in 2018 under President Trump undermined the deal, reigniting tensions.

3- Regional Ripple Effects:-

- If Iran acquires nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia has hinted it will pursue the same to match Iran.
- Turkey and Egypt could also reconsider their nuclear policies, leading to a sequence of proliferation in the Arab World.
- This would transform the Middle East into a multipolar nuclear theatre, increasing instability.

Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East Threatens the Global Non-Proliferation Regime:-

1- Undermining the NPT's Credibility:-

- The NPT rests on three pillars: non-proliferation, dis-armament, and peaceful use of nuclear ~~weapons~~ energy.
- Israel's refusal to join the NPT, despite its stockpile of ~~weapons~~, show the limitations of the treaty.
- Iran's disputed compliance shows that enforcement becomes weak when major powers are not united.
- Together, they reveal the flaws in how universal and fair the NPT really is.

2- Erosion of International Norms:-

- The ~~Middle East~~ highlights the problem of double standards: Israel's nuclear status is tolerated by Western powers, while Iran faces sanctions.
- This selective enforcement creates distrust among developing nations, who views non-proliferation rules as politically motivated.

3- Risk of a Regional Nuclear Arms Race:

- If Iran develop a nuclear bomb, it would likely push other regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt to also seek nuclear weapons. This kind of nuclear competition would make the Middle East more unstable, increasing the risk of conflict.
- At the same time, it would weaken the global non-proliferation regime, as other regions like East Asia might follow the same path, using Iran's example as a justification to pursue their own nuclear program.

4- Global Security Concerns:-

- Instability in the Middle East increases the danger that nuclear materials could be stolen or acquired by extremist groups like ISIS or Al-Qaeda, raising the threat of nuclear terrorism.
- At the same time, if more states in the region acquire nuclear weapons, it will make global arms control far more difficult.
- A nuclear-armed Middle East could trigger miscalculation, accidental use or even direct confrontation, thereby heightening the risk of a wider nuclear conflict at the global level.

i- Weakening of International Institutions:-

- The inability of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to enforce strict compliance on Iran, along with the lack of oversight over Israel's program, undermines the credibility of global institutions.

- When these bodies appear weak or biased, other states may lose trust in them and feel encouraged to bypass rules or pursue nuclear options on their own, further eroding the non-proliferation regime.

Measures to Prevent Escalation:-

1- Reviving and Expanding the JCPOA:-

- A renewed nuclear deal with Iran is critical to restore trust.
- This agreement should include stricter limits on Uranium enrichment, longer duration for restrictions, and more intrusive inspections by the IAEA.
- In return, gradually lifting sanctions would encourage Iran to follow the rules.

2- Pursuing a Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-free Zone (NWFZ):-

- The UN has long pushed for a Nuclear-Weapon-free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East, similar to the ones already set up in Africa and Latin America. Such a zone would reduce the risk of a regional arms race and build trust among rival states.
- For this to succeed, Israel would require credibility for security guarantees to feel secure without nuclear weapons, while Iran would need to accept full transparency and monitoring of its nuclear program. These parallel assurances are essential for ~~both~~ build mutual trust, make Middle East NWFZ.
- Though ambitious, every partial step towards NWFZ could reduce tensions.

3- Addressing Regional Security Concerns:-

- ~~Many~~ Many Middle Eastern states perceive nuclear weapons as security guarantees in an uncertain environment.
- Confidence-building measures, such as arms control talks, regional dialogue forums and conventional arms limitation agreements could reduce reliance on nuclear deterrence.

4- Strengthening the NPT and IAEA:-

- ~~Make~~ Make the NPT more universal by pressuring outlier states, including Israel, India and Pakistan, to engage with the treaty in some form.
- Expand IAEA's verification authority to include undeclared nuclear sites.
- Enforce penalties for violations consistently, avoiding double standards.

5- Role of Major Powers:-

- The ~~US~~ US, Russia, China and the EU must avoid using Middle Eastern nuclear issues as a theatre of great power competition.
- Instead, they should work collectively to mediate between Israel and Iran.
- Offering security guarantees to Israel and gradual reintegration for Iran could help build trust.

6- Encouraging Regional dialogues:-

- Platform like the Arab League, Organisation of Islamic ~~Cooperation~~ Cooperation (OIC), and even the Gulf of Cooperation Council (GCC) can initiate intra-regional

dialogue on nuclear risks.

- Regional ownership of the issue would prevent external powers from imposing one-sided solutions.

Conclusion :-

Hence, The nuclear rivalry between Iran and Israel shows the difficulties in controlling the spread of nuclear weapons. Israel's secret stockpile of weapons weakens the fairness of the NPT, while Iran's disputed program proves how hard it is to ensure compliance in tense regions. This rivalry could trigger a nuclear arms race, destabilising the Middle East and harming global security. To prevent this, steps like reviving the JCPOA, creating a nuclear free zone, addressing security concerns, and applying rules fairly are needed, with regional powers & major powers and regional states working together.

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