

"A nuclear-weapon-free zone shall, as a general rule, be deemed to be any zone, recognized as such by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which any group of states, in the free exercise of their sovereignty has established by virtue of a treaty or convention whereby:

- (a) the statute of total absence of nuclear weapons to which the zone shall be subject, including the procedure for the delimitation of the zone, is defined;
- (b) an international system of verification and control is established to guarantee compliance with the obligations deriving from that statute."⁴

A UN study on the NWFZs of that same year suggested a number of guiding principles for the establishment of NWFZs:

"NWFZs may be established not only in entire continents or large geographical regions, but also by smaller groups of states and even individual countries;

The zone must be effectively free of all nuclear weapons;

The initiative for creating a NWFZ should come from states within the region concerned and participation must be voluntary;

All militarily significant states should be members of the zone in order to enhance its effectiveness;

The zone must contain an effective system of verification to ensure full compliance with the agreed obligations;

Arrangements for a zone should promote the economic, scientific, and technological development of the members through international cooperation on peaceful uses of nuclear energy;

The treaty establishing the zone should be of unlimited duration."⁵

At minimum, it would seem that a NWFZ is designed to promote three main objectives: to eliminate existing and future proliferation of nuclear weapons, reduce the threat of nuclear attack against states within the zone, and avoid the contamination of the local environment from nuclear-related material. Establishing a NWFZ requires a treaty outlining the basic obligations of member states as well as a verification mechanism.

As the foregoing suggests, the guiding principles for establishing a NWFZ are fairly demanding. In fact, few regions of the world have been able to meet them, despite the widespread declaratory support that the idea of NWFZ enjoys in discussions on international peace and security. A brief overview of the historical development of NWFZs idea attests to this.

Historical Background

The idea of NWFZs first emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a byproduct of the USA-Soviet rivalry. The earliest proposals came from the Soviet Union in response to the USA doctrine of massive retaliation, which envisaged an all-out nuclear strike against a