

## **Introduction**

In recent years, there has been an intensification in the pursuit of nuclear weapon free zones (NWFZs) around the world. Two new Treaties creating such zones have been concluded: the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty, signed in Bangkok in December 1995, and the African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty, concluded in April 1996. In addition, existing NWFZs have been strengthened. France, the USA, and Britain signed the protocols to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone<sup>1</sup> in 1996, thereby giving the zone the support of all the five declared nuclear powers. Furthermore, the decision of Cuba to sign the Treaty of Tlatelolco in 1995, following moves by Argentina and Brazil to bring the Treaty into force for their own territories, addresses one of last remaining obstacles to the full realization of a nuclear weapon free zone in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the four mentioned above, NWFZs have been proposed for several other regions of the world. Despite facing significant political obstacles, these proposals have received attention both inside and outside the regions concerned.

What explains the interest in NWFZs? What are the conditions that support the establishment of NWFZs, and those that inhibit it? What are the implications of this trend for global and regional non-proliferation efforts? This paper examines these questions. It begins with a brief review of the history of NWFZs, and examines the factors which have contributed to the increasing interest in them in recent years. The next section provides a comparative perspective on the four existing zones, with particular reference to their basic obligations, geographic coverage, verification provisions, and protocols. The third section looks at the prospects for realizing proposals for NWFZs in South Asia, the Middle East and the Korean Peninsula. This is followed by an assessment of the costs and benefits of NWFZs, including an assessment of their contribution to global and regional non-proliferation and arms control efforts.

## **Definition and Requirements**

The consensus Final Document of the first Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament of 1978 states:

"The establishment of nuclear weapon free zones on the basis of agreements or arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the zone concerned and the full compliance with those agreements or arrangements, thus ensuring that the zones are genuinely free from nuclear weapons, and respect for such zones by nuclear-weapon States constitute an important disarmament measure."<sup>3</sup>

A UN General Assembly resolution of 1975, offered the following definition of a NWFZ which, while not adopted by consensus, is nevertheless of interest: