

missiles. The initiative also called for a regional ban on the production and acquisition of weapon-capable nuclear material such as enriched uranium; called on all states in the region to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty; and supported the idea of a nuclear weapon-free zone as a long term goal. Similarly, all states in the region were urged to commit to joining the chemical weapons convention once it is completed.

On 9 July 1991, after a two-day meeting in Paris, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the main arms suppliers to the Middle East, agreed to seek the elimination of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and to observe rules of restraint in exporting conventional arms to the region. Their final statement also encouraged countries in the region to develop their own proposals for arms control. At a further meeting in October 1991 in London, the five states agreed to inform each other of arms transfers to the Middle East in seven weapons categories: tanks, armoured combat vehicle, artillery, combat aircraft, combat helicopters, naval vessels, and certain missile systems. The five met again in February 1992 to discuss definitional questions relating to this agreement, such as the timing of the notifications and how inclusive to make the weapon categories. No final agreement was reached but the participants continued to consult on the issue through the spring of 1992.

The convening of the Middle East Peace Conference, which began on 30 October 1991, has provided an organizational basis for discussions on arms control in the Middle East and this issue is one of the agenda items at the conference. However, reflecting the very difficult nature of Middle East peace negotiations, arms control is an issue which is given differing emphasis by different countries in the region. Some think that arms control questions cannot be agreed upon until the broader questions relating to peace in the region are settled. Other countries believe that there cannot be viable arms control as long as Israel maintains its assumed nuclear weapons capability.

The first session of the Middle East peace talks dealing with arms control began in Washington, D.C. on 11 May 1992. The talks used a more informal seminar format and states took the opportunity to give their overall views on the situation. Thirteen Middle East countries attended the talks. Lebanon and Syria did not attend the arms control sessions because of Israel's continuing refusal to withdraw from southern Lebanon.

Outside of this forum, international pressure on Middle East countries to fully adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty continued in the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and at the UN. Syria signed a safeguards agreement with the IAEA in February 1992.