



CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION (CWC) IN MIDDLE EAST: ISRAEL'S TRYST WITH THE CWC

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are not only a regional security but also a threat to global security. Chemical weapons have been indiscriminately used in the region during wars. While global legal regime exists to curtail and prevent the production and development of chemical weapons, some great powers in the region are not party to the convention. The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is a legal regime that prevents states from producing and using chemical weapons. However, in the MENA region, the CWC has become a complex legal regime with big players like Egypt and Israel refusing to ratify the convention. States like Syria continue with their chemical weapons program due to Israel's strong military capabilities including the possession of nuclear and chemical weapons¹. In addition, many harmful chemical agents used in warfare like white phosphorus used by Israel in Gaza and Lebanon are not covered under CWC as they are considered to be incendiary agents. Adding to more complexities in the CWC regime is the fact that many states in the region like Israel are not party to the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nor has it ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). There is no declared policy by Israel on chemical weapons. This paper analyses Israel's reasons for acquiring and maintaining the chemical weapons stockpile, Israel's views on the CWC and how Israel is defending against chemical weapons proliferation.

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¹ B. Ravid, *Israel Adamant It won't Ratify Chemical Arms Treaty Before Hostile Neighbours*, "Haaretz", September 12, 2013, <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-russia-links-syria-chemwar-to-israel-1.5333503>, 30.06.2021.

1. Why Israel did not ratify CWC

Israel admitted that it had used white phosphorus against Hezbollah targets in Lebanon that affected Lebanese civilians. Israel's venture into chemical warfare however, dates back to the 1950s when Israel is reported to have used chemical munitions in warfare². The main motivator behind the chemical weapons program in Israel was the then Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion during the eve of the war with Egypt. In fact, the 'non-conventional capability' that Gurion referred to was actually chemical weapons capability. Chemical and nuclear weapons program were viewed as means to ensure survival of Israel post its independence³. Gurion considered chemical weapons for strengthening deterrence and also for combat purpose during wartime situations. He therefore paid heed to the need to operationalise as well as weaponize them⁴. A CIA report also suggests several indicators pointing towards Israel's possibilities of possessing nerve agents, mustard agents, and riot control agents along with credible delivery systems⁵.

Chemical weapons program of neighbouring states, like Egypt, further affected the decision making policy regarding chemical weapons. This fear was exacerbated with Egypt using chemical weapons against Yemen and alarmed Israeli military who then decided to launch pre-emptive strikes on Egypt's air power to destroy Cairo's ability to deliver such warheads⁶. In addition, Syria, that was believed to possess one of the largest chemical weapons stockpiles in the world, with help from Egypt and erstwhile Soviet Union, proved a concern for Israel.

² *Israel: Chemical*, "NTIP", May 2015, <http://www.nti.org/learn/countries/israel/chemical/>, 30.06.2021.

³ *Does Israel have biological and chemical weapons*, "World Bulletin", September 21, 2013, <https://www.worldbulletin.net/filebox/does-israel-have-biological-and-chemical-weapons-h118556.html>, 30.06.2021.

⁴ M. Ginsberg, *Should there be a need: The inside story of Israel's chemical and biological arsenal*, "The Times of Israel", September 17, 2013, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-chemical-arsenal-in-the-spotlight/>, 30.06.2021.

⁵ M.M. Aid, *Exclusive: Does Israel Have Chemical Weapons Too*, "Foreign Policy", September 10, 2013,

⁶ A. Orkaby, *The Tenuous Taboo: Egypt, ISIS, And Chemical Weapons In The Middle East*, "Diplomatic Courier", October 7, 2015, *The Tenuous Taboo: Egypt, ISIS, and Chemical Weapons in the Middle East* (diplomaticcourier.com), 30.06.2021.

This was also the time when Iraq, another adversary of Israel, was increasing its chemical weapons stockpile. Libya too progressed with chemical weapons program⁷. Syria, Iraq and Iran were also in possession of missile systems capable of delivering chemical warheads. Iraq was receiving assistance for chemical weapons program from western countries, like some West German companies and their subsidiaries in France and Austria⁸. The Scud category missiles like the Scud-B missiles with a range of 300kms, as well as the newer version Scud-D missiles of 700kms, were capable of delivering air burst chemical weapons⁹.

Syria and Egypt justified their chemical weapons program due to the conventional superiority of Israel as well as to counter balance Israel's superiority in nuclear weapons technology by providing a "retaliatory threat" against Israel¹⁰. Though Iraq did not share any border with Israel, its missile capability that could reach Israel was a concern. In addition, in the 1940s and again in the late 1960s, Iraqi troops took position in Jordan which borders Israel and this presence only increased by late 1980s and early 1990s.

In the 1960s, Israeli scientists visited France's chemical weapons testing range in Algerian Sahara¹¹. By 1982, there were reports that Israel had developed chemical weapons storage that was producing nerve agent in the Dimona Sensitive Storage Area in the Negev Desert. This was a report documented by the CIA based on the information that was collected by American spy satellites in 1982. The report went on to state, "while we cannot confirm whether the Israelis possess lethal chemical agents, several indicators lead us to believe that they have available to

⁷ G.M. Steinberg, *Israeli Response to the Threat of Chemical Warfare*, "Armed Forces and Society", Vol.20, No.1, Fall 1993, pp.85–101.

⁸ G.M. Steinberg, *Israeli Response...*, pp.85–101.

⁹ *Israel Chemical Chronology*, "NTI", May 2010, https://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/israel_chemical.pdf?_=1316466791, 30.06.2021.

¹⁰ G. Schumeyer, *Chemical Weapons Proliferation in the Middle East*, "US Army War College", 1990, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a222311.pdf>, 30.06.2021.

¹¹ M. Garson, *Is it time for Israel to reveal the truth about its chemical weapons*, "The Conversation", May 21, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/is-it-time-for-israel-to-reveal-the-truth-about-its-chemical-weapons-95604>, 30.06.2021.

them at least persistent and non-persistent nerve agents, a mustard agent, and several riot control agents, marched with suitable delivery systems”¹².

The failure of the international community to condemn Iraq’s chemical weapons attack during the Iran-Iraq War, in the 1989 Paris Conference on Chemical Weapons, also became a concern for Israel regarding the lackadaisical attitude of international legal arrangements¹³. Hence, there was a realisation that if Iraq attacked Israel with chemical weapons, it may not get support from the superpowers to criticise Iraq’s actions. Not only did Saddam Hussein use chemical weapons against Iran but chemical weapons were also used in northern Iraq as a weapon of terror to suppress the Kurdish population.

During the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq reportedly launched surface to surface missiles against Israeli targets and these missiles were capable of delivering chemical weapons. It was realised that chemical weapons have military utility unlike nuclear weapons that are used for deterrence and chemical weapons are inexpensive mode of attacking adversaries and achieving the ‘balance of terror.’

Further, chemical weapons in Israeli stockpile were considered to be the perfect deterrence against chemical weapons stockpile of adversaries. Else, the only other option for Israel was to either attack with nuclear weapons- an option that would be disproportionate or to attack with conventional warheads- an option that was not feasible against chemical weapons. In fact, according to a Foreign Policy report, Israel’s chemical and biological weapons arsenal “compliments” its nuclear weapons arsenal.

2. Israel and CWC

Though Israel signed the CWC in 1993, it is yet to ratify the same. While the Gulf War and Iraq’s possession of chemical weapons were two factors that determined Israel’s chemical weapons program and its

¹² *CLA Document from 1983 Indicates Israel built chemical weapons stockpile*, “Haaretz”, September 10, 2013, <https://www.haaretz.com/cia-paper-from-83-israel-had-chemical-weapons-1.5332574>, 30.06.2021.

¹³ G.M. Steinberg, *Israeli Response...*, pp.85–101.

progress, these two factors also resulted in Israel refraining from ratifying the CWC.

Also, Israel seeks broader participation of the states in CWC especially from its region. This is one of the major hurdles of the success of the CWC in the MENA region. Israel became one of the first MENA countries to sign the treaty but refrained from ratifying the same owing to the insecurities of the Arab states including Egypt that refused to sign or ratify the CWC.

The CWC in the MENA region became further complex when Egypt linked its possibility of signing and ratifying the CWC with Israel signing the NPT. Egypt considered chemical weapons as a deterrent against Israel's possible nuclear blackmail in the future. Syrian leader Assad believed that Israel must oblige to all international agreements¹⁴ to build a regional framework. Israeli opponents to the Convention, on the other hand, clarified that progress on CWC could not be made unless countries like Egypt and Syria signed and ratified the same¹⁵.

The lackadaisical progress of the CWC in the MENA led Israel to refrain from ratifying the treaty. In fact, until 1997, the United States refrained from ratifying the Convention providing Israel a scope to justify its non-accession to the Convention. But the threat from its immediate neighbours was so imminent that even when the United States acceded to the Convention by ratifying it, Israel could not do so.

Many opponents of the CWC in Israel were also of the belief that accession to the CWC would provide access for verification and inspection of possession of chemical weapons, that could in return provide intelligence to adversaries on Israel's nuclear capabilities and other military facilities.¹⁶ In fact, in 2010, the then Foreign Minister, Avigdor

¹⁴ M. Ginsburg, *Should there be a need: The inside story of Israel's chemical and biological arsenal*, "The Times of Israel", September 17, 2013, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-chemical-arsenal-in-the-spotlight/>, 30.06.2021.

¹⁵ G.M. Steinberg, *Israeli Policy on Chemical Weapons Convention*, "Iran Watch", November 1, 2000, <https://www.iranwatch.org/library/international-organization/organisation-prohibition-chemical-weapons-opcw/israeli-policy-chemical-weapons-convention>, 30.06.2021.

¹⁶ G. Steinberg, *The Chemical Weapons Convention in the Middle East: Israeli Ratification Dilemmas and Options*, "BESA Centre for Strategic Studies", February 9, 1998, <http://web.mit.edu/SSP/seminars/wed_archives98spring/steinberg.htm>, 30.06.2021.

Leiberman clarified Israel's stance on its neighbours, that Israel would not sign the CWC unless it has concluded peace treaties with its neighbours and is no longer threatened by its neighbours' chemical weapons¹⁷. Hence, Israel's 'peace first' sentiment refrains Tel Aviv from progressing with the CWC.

In September 2013, Syria acceded to the CWC after a framework agreement between the United States and Russia in Geneva on the elimination of chemical weapons. But despite its accession, there is little assurance on the fact that the Syrian government has completely disarmed its chemical weapons stockpile. The possession of mustard gas or even nerve agents like Sarin in Syria despite the CWC is a concern. Moreover, ISIS has also been reported to have used chlorine and mustard agent in Syria and Iraq¹⁸. The Fact Finding Mission (FFM) clearly states the loopholes, discrepancies and inconsistencies in Syria's declaration of its disarmament program of chemical weapons¹⁹.

Turkey, another adversary of Israel, has also signed the CWC but reports have emerged that in the recent past Turkey has used chemical weapons. In 2018, there were reports that Turkey was using chemical weapons in Afrin in north-western Syria in its operation against Kurdish YPG fighters²⁰. Such reports, though denied by Turkey, cannot be eschewed completely. Even though Iran is a party to the CWC, there are fears that its delivery systems are capable of launching chemical weapons attacks and that Iran has been carrying out research and development activities on chemical activities and possesses 'dual-use facilities', that could be used as chemical weapons. Also, there is a concern that Iran may have eliminated their chemical weapons stockpile and moved towards

¹⁷ B. Ravid, *Israel Adamant...*

¹⁸ *Building a WMD Free Zone on Existing Treaties and Conventions Syrian CWC- Adherence and Reactions, Especially in Israel*, "The Trench", May 8, 2017, <http://www.the-trench.org/wmd-free-zone-and-syria/>, 30.06.2021.

¹⁹ M. Ephraim, *Statement of Twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the State Parties, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2022, CSP-27 State of Israel National Statement (Full Statement).pdf (opcw.org), 06.12.2022.

²⁰ U. Uras, *Turkey official denies use of chemical weapons in Afrin*, "Al Jazeera", February 18, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/turkey-denies-chemical-weapons-syria-afirin-180218082237109.html>, 30.06.2021.

a “mobilisation” strategy in which chemical weapons could be produced within short notice in case of a crisis²¹.

Saudi Arabia has been accused of use of phosphorous bombs that act as chemical agents against Yemeni people²². The possession of chemical weapons in Saudi arsenal will surely make Israel concerned and uncomfortable despite growing ties with Riyadh. Concerns over asymmetric organisations like Hezbollah possessing chemical weapons and the faint scope for them to join international arms control regimes.

Israel has also urged the international community to pressurise Iran to stop assisting Hezbollah in the missile development program (which can be feared to be used for carrying non-conventional weapons too. In fact, Israel has clearly stated, “Israel does not want an escalation but has an obligation to defend itself”²³.

In 2013, the then Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Ron Prosor expressed his concerns, “In Lebanon, Hezbollah is building an army equipped with 50,000 missiles- more than many NATO members. Now they might have access to one of the largest stockpiles of chemical weapons in the world”²⁴- that is Syria. He further raised concerns on how the organisation was being allowed to operate with impunity in European soil. This obviously is another reason why Israel would not accede to the treaty due to the lack of action against these organisations by the West.

Similarly, it is not just the chemical weapons arsenal in the Middle East that raise concern to Israel. North Korea is also believed to be in possession of chemical weapons and related delivery systems like long range artillery and missiles²⁵ and is not a party to the CWC. In future, chemical weapons or

²¹ J.B. Tucker, *The Future of Chemical Weapons*, “The New Atlantis”, Fall 2009/ Winter 2010, https://www.thenewatlantis.com/docLib/20100316_TNA26Tucker.pdf, 30.06.2021.

²² *Ansarullah: Saudi Arabia using chemical weapons against Yemenis*, “Fars News Agency”, June 8, 2015, <http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13940318000399>, 30.06.2021.

²³ *Israel reportedly concerned about chemical weapons threat from Syria*, “The Tower”, February 2, 2018, <http://www.thetower.org/5955-israel-reportedly-concerned-about-chemical-weapons-threat-from-syria/>, 30.06.2021.

²⁴ *Syria's chemical weapons in Hezbollah's reach*, “The Times of Israel”, April 24, 2013, http://www.timesofisrael.com/syrias-chemical-weapons-in-hezbollahs-reach/?fb_comment_id=464765696934885_71797796, 30.06.2021.

²⁵ C. Varriale, *North Korea's Weapon of Mass Destruction*, “Arms Control Association”, September 2018, *North Korea's Other Weapons of Mass Destruction | Arms Control Association*, 30.06.2021.

agents can be proliferated from cash crunched North Korea to the MENA region both to states and non-state actors in return for hard currency especially as North Korea faces sanctions due to its nuclear and missile program.

In fact, in 2013 the then Israel's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Yigal Palmor expressed concerns, "Terror organisations acting as proxies for certain regional states, similarly pose chemical weapons threat"²⁶.

Israel however, views this chemical weapons development issue in the Middle East in a different light. In 2013, Palmor stated clearly, "Unfortunately, Israel signed the convention, other countries in the Middle East, including those that have used chemical weapons recently or in the past or are believed to be working to improve their chemical capabilities, have failed to follow suit and have indicated that their position would remain unchanged even if Israel ratifies the convention"²⁷.

However, officials of Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) feel that Israel's close allies must apply pressure on Israel to sign the CWC. This is probably because there is concern regarding exact quantity and quality of Israel's chemical weapons program as the OPCW has no provisions for making quantitative as well as qualitative assessments of non-members of the CWC²⁸. The OPCW believes that the CWC is a non-discriminatory international regime that would require countries like Israel and Egypt to join the Convention in order to "create an impact on national, regional and global security"²⁹. Israel's accession to the Convention is believed would "multiply the security benefits accruing from the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons" and help "build confidence and increase transparency across the region" by making the CWC non-discriminatory³⁰.

²⁶ B. Ravid, *Israel Adamant ...*

²⁷ B. Ravid, *Israel Adamant ...*

²⁸ L. Berman, *Chemical arms official urges allies to pressure Israel into joining pact*, "The Times of Israel", December 11, 2014, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/chemical-arms-group-wants-allies-to-pressure-israel-into-joining-pact/>, 30.06.2021.

²⁹ G. Asirwatham, *New Opportunities for Chemical Disarmament in Middle East*, "Amman Security Colloquium", November 13, 2013, https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/DDG/DDG_Amman_Security_Colloquium_Speech.pdf, 30.06.2021.

³⁰ G. Asirwatham, *New Opportunities...*

However, just like by virtue of the Nixon-Meir deal of 1969 that the United States vowed for silence over Israel's nuclear programme, the United States has also maintained its silence over the threat of chemical weapons in Israel. This is probably because Washington sees the possession of chemical weapons in the arsenal of its allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia as a perfect deterrent against chemical weapons threat emanating from US' own adversaries in the Middle East. The case is similar to how China views North Korean nuclear weapons as a perfect deterrent against the United States in the North East Asian Region.

Israel on the other hand, has improvised upon its technological parameters to defend military as well as civilians against chemical weapons attack. For example, Israel possesses head gears for military and civilians, special efforts have been made to protect critical military installations, possessing one of the best protected air bases against chemical weapons in the world and possessing the capability to launch offensive attacks despite a chemical weapons attack as also possessing other capabilities that are capable of conducting retaliatory strikes against adversaries³¹. National training exercises are conducted to prepare people for emergency situations including attack against Israel employing chemical weapons³². In addition, Israel has adopted its own export control measures that are in line with the Australia Group that has stringent regulations on dual-use chemical technologies.

Israel has acceded to the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use of in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacterial Methods of Warfare under the League of Nations. But this Protocol does not completely ban the use of chemical weapons and allows a state to exercise the right to use such weapons should it be attacked with such weapons first. Therefore, the Geneva Protocol provides scope for Israel to justify its possession of such weapons.

³¹ W. Seth Carus, *Chemical Weapons in the Middle East*, "The Washington Institute for Near East Policy", December 1988, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus9.pdf>, 30.06.2021.

³² *Israel Chemical Chronology*, "NTI", May 2010, https://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/israel_chemical.pdf?_=1316466791, 30.06.2021.

3. Will Israel Join CWC in future?

White phosphorus, a chemical agent used by Israel may fall into the category of “incendiary weapons” banned under Protocol III of the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). This Protocol prohibits the use of incendiary weapons against military targets located among civilians³³. But Israel is not a party to this Protocol. Thus even if it ratifies the CWC, it would be free to use white phosphorous like it has been using till date. Such weapons are effectively dispersed in artillery shells and rockets and Israel possesses sophisticated artillery to disperse such agents strengthening their deterrence against asymmetric threats that also possess credible artillery strength.

In fact, according to reports, the Jericho-1 missile is better suited for carrying nuclear and chemical warheads rather than conventional ones³⁴. In fact, chemical weapons are viewed as ‘midway deterrent’ by Israel between conventional and nuclear weapons³⁵. Its chemical weapons are considered to be complementing nuclear weapons and allowing Israel to possess an amalgamation of WMD deterrent vis-a-vis states possessing nuclear weapons and also against adversaries without nuclear weapons capability. Again, since chemical weapons production in Israel is also situated amid well-developed chemical industry, that forms one of the important constituents of the economy, acceding to the Convention could jeopardise its industrial growth in chemicals.

Regional powers which are suspected of possessing chemical weapons but are party to the CWC like Syria would be of greater concern for Israel as that would highlight the failure of the CWC. Chemical weapons act as ‘poor man’s atomic bomb’ and could be the WMD choice for many states. As states continue to possess such weapons, so as to deter US forward forces, Israel’s ratification of the CWC would only become a more complex task. Israel believes that chemical weapons should be removed from the arsenals

³³ *Explained: What is white phosphorous, the munition that Israel us accused of using in Gaza*, “Deccan Herald”, October 23, 2023, (deccanherald.com), 30.06.2021.

³⁴ “Israel Missile Overview,” *NTI*, November 12, 2021, <Israel Missile Overview (nti.org)>

³⁵ A. Benn, *Israel’s decision time*, “Bulletin of Atomic Scientists”, March/April 2001, Chemical Weapons Convention: Israel’s Decision Time (sagepub.com), 30.06.2021.

of the world. Hence, unless there is a global disarmament of chemical weapons from arsenals, Israel would continue to view such weapons that could strengthen its deterrence especially as nuclear weapons would not be the WMD option against symmetric as well as asymmetric threats.

Tel Aviv believes that the history of use of chemical weapons makes it necessary to pay attention to “prohibition, compliance and verification” to ensure there is complete disarmament of chemical weapons in the concerned state’s arsenal. “Past uses of chemical weapons, particularly in the Middle East, underscore the need for the international community to support the critical work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its mechanisms”³⁶.

Also, there are concerns that if Israel ratifies the Convention then it would be coerced to open its military facilities for international inspection and verification that may not be acceptable to Tel Aviv³⁷. There could be hence, demand from the international community to open Israel’s nuclear facility in Dimona on accusation that the facility hosts chemical weapons³⁸.

If Israel has to ratify CWC, its partners would need to pressurise Israel to do so. One of its important partners is the United States and as of now there has been no positive move from Washington to even request Israel to reconsider the CWC seriously. In fact, according to reports, in 2010, Egypt proposed a plan for groundwork for establishing a Middle East free of WMD that was to be sponsored by the United States but unfortunately, the United States postponed this proposal³⁹.

For Israel the ‘peace first’ solution based on which it assumes the success of such international agreements would only hold true when there is a solution to the Israel-Palestine Peace Process and that for the moment seems to be a far-fetched dream.

However should Israel decide to join and ratify the CWC, it would surely set an example for the other states in the Middle East which have not

³⁶ M. Ephraim, *Statement of Twenty-seventh session...*

³⁷ A. Benn, *Israel’s decision time*, *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, March/April 2001, Chemical Weapons Convention: Israel’s Decision Time (sagepub.com), 30.06.2021.

³⁸ A. Benn, *Israel’s decision time...*

³⁹ J. Cook, *Israel’s chemical arsenal under new scrutiny*, “Al Jazeera”, September 20, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/09/2013918131913662278.html>, 30.06.2021

ratified the treaty that despite its security dilemma and concerns, Israel chose global peace and stability over its own inhibitions.

Nevertheless, there must be continued efforts to engage every power in the MENA in peace talks and dialogues to attain a WMD free region. Since states in the MENA region have not yet out-rightly possessed nuclear weapons, any progress on chemical weapons disarmament could motivate states in the region to refrain from nuclear weapons and focus more on strengthening security through strategic stability. This would mean that states in the region would need to actively participate in talks held on disarmament to abide by the legally binding mechanisms that discourage the possession and use of WMD.

A holistic approach needs to be taken on weapons that act as incendiary agents and states must refrain from using of such weapons. A self imposed moratorium could be the first step in progressing towards legally binding mechanisms to prevent and prohibit the use of such weapons. A self imposed moratorium allows the state to apply self imposed legal mechanisms without having to join the larger legal framework leaving scope for the state to use such weapons in case they are attacked with such weapons or WMDs.

4. Conclusion

Global peace and stability can only be ensured when all states in a region oblige to the international agreements that their neighbours are obliging to. By joining the CWC, Israel would set an example as a major power in the region. Despite the odds if it accedes to the CWC, it would raise Israel's status not only in the global forum but it would be in a better position to discuss issues pertaining to regional stability and peace.

S u m m a r y

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are not only a regional security but also a threat to global security. The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is a legal

regime that prevents states from producing and using chemical weapons. However, in the MENA region, the CWC has become a complex legal regime with big players like Egypt and Israel refusing to ratify the convention. States like Syria continue with their chemical weapons program due to Israel's strong military capabilities including the possession of nuclear and chemical weapons⁴⁰. In addition, many harmful chemical agents used in warfare like white phosphorus used by Israel in Gaza and Lebanon are not covered under CWC as they are considered to be incendiary agents. Adding to more complexities in the CWC regime is the fact that many states in the region like Israel are not party to the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nor has it ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). There is no declared policy by Israel on chemical weapons. This paper analyses Israel's reasons for acquiring and maintaining the chemical weapons stockpile, Israel's views on the CWC and how Israel is defending against chemical weapons proliferation.

Keywords: weapons of mass destruction, MENA, Chemical Weapons Convention, Non Proliferation Treaty, Israel

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⁴⁰ B. Ravid, *Israel Adamant It won't Ratify Chemical Arms Treaty Before Hostile Neighbours*, "Haaretz", September 12, 2013, <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-russia-links-syria-chemwar-to-israel-1.5333503>, 30.06.2021.