**Forum: Disarmament and International Security Committee - DISEC**

**Issue #1 Measures to address the rising risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East**

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**Introduction**

Nuclear proliferation in the Middle East has been a recurring topic over history, but it is now doing a resurgence. With numerous nations in the region already holding nuclear capabilities or actively striving to develop them, the international community is concerned about the possibility of a nuclear arms race, increasing tensions, and the potential for fatal war. Currently, there is an arms race in the Middle East between opposing sides to see who gets military dominance over the region and becomes that region's superpower. Nuclear Weapons have been the same objective of the arms race, with many nations being able to succeed in their production of them and others getting extremely close. This poses an immense recurrent threat to the region and the world itself as with many countries being ready to arm themselves with nuclear power it would explode tensions in the region and throw it into conflict. In doing this, it would cause irreparable harm to the region and possibly the world itself. This rising risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East is a crucial issue for world security and requires global leaders to cooperate to stop the spread of nuclear weapons in the area.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Nuclear Proliferation:** The spread of nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons technology, or fissile material to countries that do not already possess them.

**Nuclear Weapons:** A nuclear weapon is a device that uses a nuclear reaction to create an explosion.

**No first use (NFU):** Pledge where a nuclear power formally refrains from the use of nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in warfare, except for as a second strike in retaliation to an attack by an enemy power using WMDs.

**Iran Nuclear Ambitions:** Iran claims that its development of nuclear technology is for peaceful energy and medical purposes, but its program has been suspected of being a cover for developing nuclear weapons, leading to international sanctions and negotiations.

**Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty:** Objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament.

**Israel Nuclear presence:** Israel has possessed nuclear weapons since the 1960s, it maintains a policy of nuclear opacity, never officially confirming the existence of its nuclear program.

**Islamic State:** An Islamic state is a state that has a form of government based on Islamic law.

**General Overview**

Throughout modern history, nuclear weapons have been one of the main threats to the world. More specifically, since the invention of nuclear weapons, the Middle East region has been a hotbed of tension and conflict, with nuclear proliferation being a major concern. Several countries in the region, like Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia, have either developed nuclear weapons or are suspected of pursuing nuclear ambitions. This had led to an arms race and the destabilization of the region. Western Nuclear powers and the International community have been actively trying to address this issue through diplomatic negotiations, and strong sanctions against those seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

**6 Day War**

The Six-Day War, which took place from June 5 to 10, 1967, was a conflict between Israel and the neighboring Arab states of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. This war happened as a result of a series of escalating tensions and provocations between Israel and Arab states, this includes border clashes, and military buildups. Even though nuclear weapons were not used during the 6-day war, it motivated multiple states to start the development of nuclear weapons. Moreover, it is widely thought that Israels' aggressiveness in the 6-day war came from its mentality that it had a nuclear deterrent, as they held nuclear weapons at the time. Which was crucial for their success. Moreover, the 6-day war spread the need for Nuclear capabilities and Weapons to be able to fight against stronger powers throughout the Arab States.

**Operation Opera**

On June 7, 1981, the Israeli Air Force carried out Operation Opera, also known as the Osirak bombing. The operation was designed to destroy a nuclear reactor complex in Iraq that was constructed with French assistance. Israel had the impression that these Osiris-class reactors were a part of a covert Iraqi nuclear weapons development. Israel saw this to be a serious threat to both the stability of the region and its own national security. Eight Israeli F-16 and six F-15 fighter jets, which the US had previously delivered to Israel for its own national defense, were used in the operation. They were tasked with striking the Osirak reactor complex, which was located close to Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. The mission was risky, as the reactor was heavily fortified and protected by Iraqi air defenses. Despite the risks, the Israeli pilots successfully executed the mission and destroyed the reactor, setting back Iraq's nuclear program for several years as the reactors would never be rebuilt. Iraq and France always claimed that the reactor was for peaceful research and energy purposes. As such, The attack was widely condemned by the international community, with many countries accusing Israel of violating international law and destabilizing the region. However, Israel defended its actions, claiming that it was acting in self-defense and that the reactor posed a significant threat to its national security. For Israel, The operation was seen as a significant milestone in its efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. Furthermore, the operation helped to warn other Middle Eastern nations of what would happen if they were to try the same thing. Which they did in the bombing of the Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007. Overall, the operation proved to be a major success for Israel internally. However, the international community considered it an unnecessary preemptive strike and stood on Iraq’s side.

**Iran’s nuclear sanctions:**

Iran has been subject to a number of economic and diplomatic sanctions as a result of the international community's worries over Iran's nuclear program. Since the beginning of the 2000s, these sanctions have been in effect and have progressively become more severe. Iran has been charged by the world community, led by the United States, with secretly building nuclear weapons. Iran has refuted these claims, claiming that the only goals of its nuclear program are peaceful ones, such as the production of medicinal isotopes and nuclear power. The sanctions against Iran have many included measures. Like restrictions on trade, as the international community imposed restrictions on the exports and imports that Iran can make. Furthermore, Iran was charged with financial sanctions on its financial sector and central bank, making it extremely hard for Iran to conduct international transactions. Moreover, many countries reduced or broke diplomatic relations with Iran and imposed travel restrictions on their officials. Not only that but an arms embargo was also placed on Iran making it unable to import or export weapons. Most importantly, Iran was hit by sanctions on its oil and gas sector, which is one of the main sources of income for the country. Iran's economy has been significantly impacted by these sanctions, leading to a fall in oil exports and a devaluation of its currency. Iran has however persisted in maintaining its nuclear program, claiming that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty gives it the right to do so. However, in 2015, Iran reached a historic agreement with the international community, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which lifted some sanctions in exchange for Iran agreeing to limit its nuclear program. Regardless, in 2018, the United States withdrew from the agreement as they stated that Iran was not properly complying and reimposed sanctions on Iran, leading to increased tensions between the two countries.

**Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

**Iran**

Currently, Iran is the country with the most development of nuclear technology in the Middle East. Though Iran says that their development of this technology has only been for non-military uses like medical research. In 1968 Iran decided to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which is a pact that enables countries to produce nuclear technology if its for peaceful uses. Even though Iran claims they have been using the technology ethically, many countries have expressed their worry that this might not be true. Some believe that Iran may be attempting to produce nuclear weapons. Iran has questioned the international community and their injustice in solving this issue, particularly Israel. It has been presumed that they own nuclear weapons, but no one has ever questioned them.

**Israel**

Israel although questioned to have a secret nuclear weapons program, they have never confirmed or denied the accusation. Israel has been significantly speaking against the Iran nuclear deal. They have tried motivating worldwide countries to forcefully prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Israel has also worried about other countries like Saudi Arabia and Turkey and the possibility of their ownership of nuclear weapons. Not only they've been politically attempting to prevent these weapons but they've also been rumored to have had secret operations with the goal to sabotage the nuclear programs of other nations in the Middle East, including Iran.

**United States of America (USA)**

Even though the United States is not located in the Middle East they are an active country in the solving of this issue. They've expressed their worry for nuclear proliferation as well as terrorists getting their hands on these nuclear weapons. When it comes to sides in the issue, the US has stated they are on Israels’. They support the right to self-defense against possible threats including nuclear weapons. Several initiatives were set in place by the US in an attempt to resolve the issue. For example, the NPT in which they teamed up with nations all over the world to collaborate. Ever since 2018 when the United States withdrew from the JCPOA tensions between the U.S. and Iran have increased, and both countries have done provocative actions and menacing comments.

**Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia, a largely Sunni Muslim country, is worried about Shia Muslim countries such as Iran pursuing nuclear weapons. Although they have stated their support for a nuclear-free Middle East and urged the international community to strive toward peace, they do not want to be at a disadvantage when compared to other nuclear-weapons states. Despite asking to work with other countries to avoid nuclear proliferation in the area, there have been reports that Saudi Arabia is secretly constructing its own nuclear weapons. They have made major changes to their nuclear program in order to become a prominent player in the worldwide nuclear energy industry.

**Russia**

Russia is a significant country that plays a big part in the debated topic of the Middle East's increased risk of nuclear proliferation. The ongoing crisis in Syria, which has drawn a variety of regional and global parties, is one of Russia's primary worries in the Middle East. Russia, a Syrian ally, has contributed greatly by military intervention in the conflict. Concerns of nuclear proliferation have been raised as a result of Russia's deployment of nuclear missiles in the region as part of its military efforts. Russia is an ally of Iran, a partner of Egypt, and an important player in Syria and Libya, as well as Israel, the Afghan government, the Taliban, and the Palestinians, among many other political groups.

**Timeline of Events**

| **Date** | **Description of event** |
| --- | --- |
| 1957 | The USA signed a civil nuclear cooperation contract with Iran as part of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" program, whose aim was to encourage the peaceful utilization of nuclear energy and technology around the world. The agreement gave Iran technical support and collaboration in the advancement of nuclear energy for peaceful uses such as electricity generation and medical studies. |
| 1967 | Israel has never formally claimed to have nuclear weapons, but it is commonly assumed that it does. Instead, Israel practices "nuclear ambiguity," which means it does neither acknowledge or deny having nuclear weapons in order to generate strategic uncertainty. Despite this strategy, Israel is regarded to have some of the most sophisticated nuclear capabilities in the world, with estimates ranging from dozens to hundreds of nuclear weapons. The subject of Israel's nuclear program has sparked regional and international concern, particularly given the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East and the greater potential of nuclear proliferation. |
| 1979 | Iran's government aimed to create an independent system of governance after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Concerns about Iran's potential ambition for nuclear power were notably evoked by this new strategy within the international community. Iran's nuclear program increased following the revolution, with the nation producing its own nuclear technology and recruiting outside support to build nuclear power reactors. These advancements alerted the global community, which resulted in heightened surveillance and tensions between Iran and other nations. |
| 1981 | Israel carried out an unexpected attack on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor, which was situated near Baghdad and was thought to be part of Iraq's nuclear weapons program. The assault devastated the reactor, putting Iraq's nuclear program several years behind schedule. The international community largely condemned the assault, but Israel justified it as a necessary measure to prevent Iraq from acquiring nuclear weapons, which Israel saw as a threat to its own security. The assault heightened tensions in the area and raised worries about nuclear proliferation, especially in Middle Eastern nations. |
| 1992 | Iran was subject to restrictions by the UN Security Council as a result of worries about its nuclear program. The restrictions were put in place to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons technology, including the importation of specific components and know-how for uranium enrichment and rocket development. The penalties were designed to put pressure on Iran to abide by international nuclear safeguards and inspections as part of a larger international endeavor to resolve worries about nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. Iran persisted in pursuing its nuclear program despite the sanctions, raising hostilities and international pressure in the years that followed. |
| 2002 | As part of its rationale for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the United States charged Iraq with having weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), including nuclear weapons, in 2002. The allegations made by the US government were supported by intelligence reports that indicated Iraq was still working on its nuclear program, despite having promised to disarm following the first Gulf War in 1991. However, after the invasion, there was no proof of ongoing nuclear weapons projects, and it was subsequently discovered that the intelligence used to support the conflict was inaccurate. Significant regional and international repercussions of the US-led war and control of Iraq, as well as the dispute surrounding the WMD allegations, include a rise in Middle Eastern unrest and resurrected worries about nuclear proliferation. |
| 2010 | The Stuxnet computer malware, which was thought to have been developed by the US and Israel to thwart Iran's nuclear program, was found in 2010. The virus targeted the centrifuges used for uranium enrichment at Iran's nuclear sites, seriously harming the country's nuclear program. Concerns about the use of cyber warfare and its potential effects on nuclear proliferation and global security were raised by the finding of Stuxnet and its efficacy. The event added to ongoing discussions about Iran's nuclear program and the use of sanctions and other measures to control it. It also increased animosity between Iran and the US and its allies. |
| 2015 | In 2015 the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed by the United States, United Kingdom, France, China, Russia, and Germany (P5+1) as well as Iran. JCPOA’s goal was to restrict Iran's nuclear program with the hope of reducing nuclear advancement. As a part of the JCPOA Iran would get its economic sanctions removed. Iran's nuclear facilities and uranium enrichment operations would be restricted by the agreement, as these are essential components of nuclear advancement. Foreign monitoring and inspection were also set in place to assure compliance. The JCPOA was regarded as a huge political accomplishment as well as a crucial milestone in decreasing tensions and stopping nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. |
| 2018 | The United States under the leadership of Donald Trump withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and restored economic sanctions on Iran. The decision to withdraw from the agreement was very contested, drawing criticism from many of the US's acquaintances and other signatories. The US maintained that the JCPOA was defective and did not go far enough to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and that reimposing sanctions were required to drive Iran to negotiate a new, more effective deal. |
| 2019 | As a result of the US’s resignation from the JCPOA and their decision to reimpose the economic sanctions, Iran decided that they would no longer comply with some constraints. Particularly, they stated they would no longer comply with the limitation on its stocks of enriched uranium and heavy water. Which are essential components for building nuclear bombs. Iran expressed that since the US had withdrawn from the agreement, they were no longer obligated to its rules and that these actions were essential to preserve its national security. The action was strongly condemned by the deal's other signatories, who encouraged Iran to stick to its commitments under the JCPOA. The declaration heightened tensions between Iran and the United States, as well as the world community as a whole. |
| 2021 | Israel allegedly launched an attack on Iran's nuclear plant at Natanz that seriously damaged it. Iran's uranium enrichment centrifuges, which are a crucial part of its nuclear program, were the focus of the strike. Israel was accused of trying to disrupt Iran's nuclear program, as well as was blamed by Iran, for the strike. Israeli intelligence was reportedly engaged in the operation, however, Israel did not formally acknowledge or deny involvement in the strike. The incident contributed to wider regional and worldwide worries about the possibility of nuclear proliferation and conflict in the Middle East, while also escalating tensions between Israel and Iran. |

**UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

**Resolution 1540**

Resolution 1540 was introduced by the UN Security Council in 2004. It held the goal of preventing non-state entities, such as terrorist organizations, from obtaining nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, as well as their delivery methods and associated materials with the weapons.

The resolution required that all members of the UN take crucial steps to stop the spread of the weapons and materials. These actions may include establishing the proper legal and regulatory frameworks, monitoring and securing the pertinent materials, and working with other states to prevent the transfer or use of such materials without authorization.

The Security Council established the 1540 Committee, which monitors the resolution's implementation and aids governments in upholding their duties, to guarantee conformity with the resolution. The committee offers technical support to states upon request and updates the Security Council frequently on the implementation of the resolution.

As a result of Resolution 1540, numerous nations have improved their national laws, rules, and export controls relating to nuclear, chemical, and biological proliferation. Favorably, this has importantly raised public awareness of the risks involved with WMD. Although there are still challenges, the resolution remains a vital tool for halting the spread of WMD and their delivery systems.

**Resolution 687**

A significant resolution that addressed Iraq's holding of WMDs and associated nuclear facilities was UN Security Council Resolution 687, which was enacted in 1991.

By this resolution, Iraq was obligated to destroy all of its WMDs, along with any storage facilities or delivery systems that might be associated to the weapons.

To ensure that Iraq followed with its duties regarding the disarmament of their WMD's, the resolution also called for the establishment of a new Special Commission, later known as the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM). UNSCOM conducted inspections and investigations in Iraq throughout the 1990s in an effort to identify and shut down any nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons program.

Iraq kicked out UNSCOM inspectors in 1998, which sparked a conflict against the US and its allies. In order to carry out the disarmament of Iraq's WMD programs, the Security Council established a subsequent Resolution. Which was resolution 1284 which established a new inspection regime, the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC).

UNMOVIC efforts in Iraq continued up until the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Where the US-led effort aimed to topple Saddam Hussein's government and eliminate any lingering WMD capabilities. However, no WMDs were discovered, and further analysis revealed that Iraq had dismantled its WMD programs as a result of international inspections and sanctions in the early 1990s, proving further efforts by the UN to have been uneccesary.

Resolution 687 serves as an example of the Security Council's ongoing efforts to prevent the spread of WMDs and achieve their disarmament in countries that possess them. It also highlights the challenges in ensuring that states uphold their commitments to disarm, particularly when those states may attempt to conceal their WMD activities or evade inspections.

**Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

**The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**

In 1968 the NPT treaty was made but it took effect in 1970. Its goal was to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and still support the use of nuclear energy peacefully. The NPT divides countries into two groups. Countries that already possess nuclear weapons are called NWS (Nuclear-weapon states), and countries that don't possess them are called NNWS (non-nuclear weapon states). The treaty stated that NWS was to eliminate their nuclear weapons and NNWS weren't allowed to obtain nuclear weapons and must permit inspections of their nuclear facilities to make sure that they are not producing any nuclear weapons. The treaty was a significant action to try to reduce nuclear proliferation in the region. But, some people didn't agree, as they claimed that it wasn't effective in accomplishing the goal. The reason for their contradiction was that some nations, like India, Pakistan, and North Korea, acquired nuclear weapons even though they didn't sign the pact.

**The United Nations Security Council Resolutions**

The UNSC (United Nations Security Council) is one of the principal committees of the United Nations. They are responsible for maintaining worldwide safety. UNSC has made several attempts to address the issue of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East by creating resolutions. These resolutions' goal was to create restrictions on countries with possible development of nuclear weapons to decrease them worldwide and insure safety. For example, in 1991, the UNSC created a resolution that forced Iraq to get rid of its weapons of mass destruction (WMD). As well as in 2006 created a resolution that ordered Iran to end all of its uranium enrichment operations, essential to the creation of nuclear weapons. These resolutions have helped keep Iran away from nuclear weapons, as well as have created a signal to other nations that were possibly considering nuclear proliferation to stay away from it. The United Nations Security Council resolution has made substantial contributions to resolving the issue of the spread of nuclear weapons. They forced nations suspected of developing nuclear weapons to comply with international rules. Other opponents contend, however, that these treaties have not been effective in discouraging other countries from pursuing their nuclear weapons efforts. For example, despite numerous prohibitions and resolutions, North Korea has expanded its nuclear weapons program, raising questions about the efficiency of UN Security Council decisions.

**The Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone**

A proposed treaty called the Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone would forbid the development, manufacturing, and use of nuclear weapons in the region. The agreement intends to ease tensions and advance regional cooperation on peaceful nuclear energy. Since its initial presentation in 1974, the idea for a Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone has been considered at several international summits and conferences, including the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The concept hasn't been implemented yet, though, because of the region's numerous political and security issues. The treaty's supporters contend that it may be able to ease regional tensions by preventing the spread of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. As proof of the viability and efficiency of such accords, they cite the success of other nuclear-weapon-free zones across the globe, such as the Treaty of Tlatelolco in Latin America and the Caribbean. Opponents counter that the continuous political tensions and conflicts in the Middle East, notably the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, make the plan for a Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone difficult to succeed. They also mention the fact that certain nations in the area, like Iran, have nuclear capabilities and could be hesitant to give them up.

**The Iran Nuclear Deal**

Iran and the P5+1 (United States, United Kingdom, France, China, Russia, and Germany) nations made a significant deal in 2015 known as the Iran Nuclear Deal or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In exchange for the removal of economic sanctions against Iran, the JCPOA sought to restrict Iran's nuclear program. Iran was compelled by the JCPOA to lower its uranium enrichment capacity, let the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) conduct intrusive inspections of its nuclear sites, and accept limitations on its nuclear program for at least 15 years. Iran's economic restrictions were withdrawn in exchange, allowing it to reintegrate into the world economy. The JCPOA has contributed to decreasing tensions and stopping nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. The JCPOA was praised highly for its potential to prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons as well as for its advancement of regional security and peace. However, the JCPOA was also controversial and came under condemnation from many who believed it did not go far enough to completely forbid Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Others said that the deal was too kind to Iran and that the easement of the sanctions would give Iran the opportunity to support terrorism and endanger the region. Due to concerns about Iran's compliance with the pact and the potential that Iran may ultimately obtain nuclear weapons, the United States withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018. Other parties to the agreement strongly disagreed with this decision, which heightened tensions between the US and Iran. Although the JCPOA represented a considerable effort to address the issue of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, its effectiveness is still in doubt.

**Possible Solutions**

Nuclear Proliferation is a major threat to current society and has to be addressed. There could be multiple solutions to solve this problem, the first of them being to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards system. Focusing more on these treaties and systems would improve their enforcement and promote transparency and cooperation between states. Another possible solution would be to promote regional stability and confidence-building measures between middle eastern states. Which could help reduce tensions and the need for nuclear weapons in the Middle East. This involves addressing the root causes of conflicts and tensions in the region, It can build trust among states through information exchanges, transparency and joint training exercises, which would encourage economic development and cooperation to reduce regional tensions. Lowering the risk of Nuclear proliferation.

**Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)**

The rising risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East connects majorly to SDG objective 16. Which seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive communities for sustainable development, ensure access to justice for all, and create effective, responsible, and inclusive institutions at all levels. Nuclear proliferation can jeopardize peace and stability since it might lead to an arms race and heighten tensions between countries. Conflict, violence, and instability may emerge from this, opposing SDG 16’s goal. SDG 16 advocates for inclusive and responsible governance, the building of institutions, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. These initiatives can help by preventing nuclear proliferation and lowering the risks that come with it. Also, SDG 16 asks for worldwide justice, which is crucial to tackling the dangers posed by nuclear proliferation. Nuclear weapons proliferation can be stopped and those who break international law may be held accountable with the support of strong legal systems, efficient institutions, and the law.

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**Appendix**

1. Security challenges being faced by the US and Israel because of Russia in the Middle East
   1. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/report-russia-middle-east-national-security-challenges-united-states-and-israel-biden>
2. A video of a panel discussion on the growing dangers of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East that goes beyond Iran’s dramatic advances
   1. <https://www.stimson.org/event/nuclear-proliferation-in-the-middle-east-beyond-iran/>
3. The complication faced by countries in the Middle East wanting to use nuclear power for energy purposes and not military.
   1. <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/nuclear-power-in-the-middle-east-between-energy-needs-and-military-temptation,5542>
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   1. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/iraq-nuclear-vault/2021-06-07/osirak-israels-strike-iraqs-nuclear-reactor-40-years-later>
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