Israeli Cooperation with Nuclear Ban Treaty Diplomats Helped Prevent Bad Outcome

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By Yaakov Lappin

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Diplomats involved in efforts to set up a regional dialogue over weapons of mass destruction helped it avoid a bad outcome during a UN conference last week, arms control expert Emily Landau said on Monday.  
  
In recent day, the US vetoed an Egyptian-led drive for a Middle East nuclear weapons ban at a UN Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference in Manhattan.  
  
Landau, head of the Arms Control and Regional Security Program at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, told The Jerusalem Post, “Much of the media commentary is focusing on the fact that the US did this for Israel, and [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu has thanked [Secretary of State John] Kerry.  
  
Thanks to the US are certainly in order as it stood by Israel and its principles in a very noteworthy manner. But in addition, I would highlight that US support this time was made easier because of the cooperative approach that Israel had adopted over the past few years.”  
  
Israel, which is not a signatory to the NPT, has nevertheless spent the past two years cooperating with UN attempts, led by the Finnish diplomat Jaakko Laajava, to establish a regional dialogue on weapons of mass destruction, using the opportunity to share its concerns during a series of meetings, and through the submission of a paper.  
  
“Had Israel remained unwilling to cooperate with Laajava’s efforts, it would have been more difficult to defend. But US officials over the past year had praised Israel’s cooperation regarding the informal meetings, and this most likely strengthened their ability to argue against the new resolution that was changing the terms mid-course,” Landau said.  
  
“At the end of the day, by overplaying its hand, Egypt lost out,” she added.  
  
Cairo’s failure to push through a resolution that would have called on Israel to join the NPT mean that the “conference is at least temporarily suspended, and with it the progress that had been made. There are no terms in the framework of the NPT for continuing at this point. For Israel this is certainly good news – substantively, and in terms of the expression of US support,” Landau said.  
  
A draft proposal submitted for final vote at the NPT Review Conference “was much better than the Arab [Egyptian] proposal submitted in the first days of the conference, but it still had problematic elements,” Landau said.  
  
Those elements included a commitment to holding a weapons of mass destruction free zone conference by March 2016, and placing all of the authority in the hands of the UN secretary-general, rather than conveners such as the US and Britain.  
  
Had it been passed, the draft resolution “would have basically fired Jaakko Laajava, which it seems was one of Egypt’s objectives. It mandated the secretary- general to appoint a new facilitator. Why do that when Laajava had spent so much time and energy learning the issues and carving out a path with the regional parties?” Landau asked.  
  
“It seems that all of these elements were directed toward convening a conference by March whether Israel likes it or not,” she added. “What incentive would the Arab states have had to work seriously with Israel when they would have had the guarantee that a conference would be convened by next March, no matter what?” Earlier in May, Landau reported that the international arms control community has come to the defense of contacts between Israel and UN diplomats, who are engaged in talks aimed at including Jerusalem in a forum on weapons of mass destruction.