

Forum: Disarmament Committee (DC)

Topic: Regulating the Proliferation and Use of Ballistic Missile Systems in the Middle East

Chair

Introduction

The topic of ballistic missiles is critically important to the Middle East due to the ongoing instability in the region. Unlike weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) such as nuclear or chemical weapons, currently, there are no targeted regulations or laws made by legally binding global treaties that forbid a country from producing, buying, or launching ballistic missiles. While it still does not have the same strength of a Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD) it is still powerful enough to either destroy entire buildings or obliterate entire cities based on type. This vacuum of regulations has allowed the Middle East to develop and sustain its title as the focal point with the highest concentration and rapidly increasing density of ballistic missiles in the world.

There are two main ideas that will be discussed. The first is the lack of regulations towards ballistic missiles in the region, and the second is the impact of proliferation and use of ballistic missiles in the region. In the Middle East, there is no comprehensive framework regulating the use, development and trade of ballistic missiles and any related technologies. This lack of regulations has caused instability and tension. This has also led many countries in the MENA region to invest in ballistic missiles as a major component in their military strategy, leading to its proliferation.

Definition of Key Terms

Ballistic Missile (BM)

A ballistic missile (BM) is a rocket-powered weapon that is guided during the first stages of its launch, then shuts off during the final stages and is guided by gravity to pull it down to the intended location. Unlike cruise missiles, where the missile is powered during the whole flight, ballistic missiles are only powered through the first stages of their flight, where they are directed to the target, then powered and completely rely on momentum and gravity.

Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)

An informal voluntary multilateral partnership established in 1987 created to restrict the proliferation of missiles and other delivery systems that are capable of carrying weapons of mass destruction. It encourages participating countries to control exports that have to do with missile technologies and equipment.

Non-Proliferation

The international efforts to limit and control the spread of weapons, military technologies, and delivery systems across borders. These efforts are usually established by international agreements and export controls to strengthen global security.

General Overview

The regulation and use of ballistic missiles (BM) in the Middle East is one of the dangerous focal points in international security. As the Middle East is known for its deeply rooted historical conflicts, overlapping alliances, and an absolute blindness when it comes to the absence of agreements towards weapons and military use, the region shares the highest rate of BM in the world.

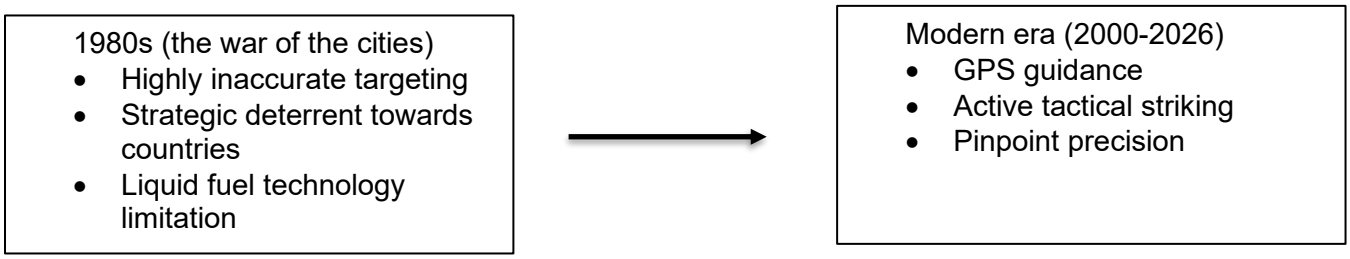
Following the Cold War crisis and the development of rocket and missile technology. The global superpowers started exporting missile technologies to their regional alies. The turning point occurred during the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) when ballistic missiles were used intensively. The conflict known as the “war of the cities” was heavily reliant on Soviet-designed Scud missiles; both nations launched hundreds of these missiles on each other’s major cities, damaging infrastructure and injuring lots of civilians. This war changed regional military strategies and accelerated the production and proliferation of these missiles.

This was further reinforced during the 1991 Gulf War, where countries began to intensify their production of BMs, due to the instability that the war caused.

Major development:

In recent events, the use of ballistic missiles in the Middle East has intensified due to recent political events and ongoing wars. The danger is no longer just the number of missiles in the region but their developed accuracy, dramatic leap in quantity, and guidance.

Evolution of ballistic missiles in the Middle East.



Historically, ballistic missiles have high chances of missing their targeted coordinates by miles. However, modern technologies have allowed solutions to address these problems. Missiles now have extremely accurate GPS guidance. BMs can now reliably terminate specific infrastructure such as military bases, airport runways, refineries, civilian desalination plants, and cities.

Subtopic 1: Regional Spread of Ballistic Missile Capabilities and Resulting Strategic Instability

As discussed before, the use and spread of ballistic missiles has increased drastically since the Cold War. This has been demonstrated most recently through the 2026 US-Iran war, where Iran has been using multiple types of ballistic missiles as their main weapons of choice. During this recent war, the use of ballistic missiles has increased the instability in the region due to the direct impact and damage caused by the projectiles and major disruption to international transport, infrastructure, and trade.

Since the Iranian revolution (1978-1979) and the confrontation with the US, Iran has been heavily investing in ballistic missiles due to their effectiveness and lower cost as compared to air force and naval infrastructure. Due to Iran's relatively smaller military budget, the conflict would be titled as an asymmetrical war due to the gap in military spending capabilities. This war has caused neighbouring countries to invest in missiles as a precaution due to the instability in the region.

Subtopic 2: Civilian Impact of Ballistic Missile Strikes in Urban and Cross-Border Environments

Ballistic missile strikes in urban and cross-border environments create severe humanitarian and legal challenges due to large destructive power, intense speeds, and expansive blast effects. When launched towards densely populated areas, missile attacks can cause intense harm to civilians and widespread structural damage and critical infrastructure damage such as housing,

schools, airports, and healthcare facilities. Based on International Humanitarian Law (IHL), parties that are involved in such conflict are strictly required to distinguish between military targets and civilian populations. However, since ballistic missiles carry such large warheads and cause expansive blast effects, obeying these rules is especially difficult in urban areas. In addition, ballistic missiles do not only create immediate destruction, but these strikes also lead to long term mass humanitarian displacement, psychological trauma to some, disrupt education, and create economic instability. Furthermore, cross-border strikes complicate UN and humanitarian responses by creating uncertain legal responsibility, blocking aid attempts, and delaying accountability for violating international law.

Subtopic 3: Evaluating Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Frameworks to Close Critical Gaps in Ballistic Missile Regulation

Already existing Non-proliferation and Arms Control frameworks such as the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and the Hague Code of Conduct against ballistic missile proliferation (HCOC) face multiple challenges in regulating and controlling the use and proliferation of ballistic missiles. A primary and constant limitation is of these frameworks is that they rely on voluntary compliance, non-binding commitments, and self-reporting mechanisms, which lack enforceable verification procedures and consequences for violations. Current frameworks heavily focus on controlling exports and the transfer of important technologies rather than focusing on the deployment and tactical use of ballistic missiles in conflict. To address this critical vacuum of regulations, the UN member states must investigate mechanisms to strengthen monitoring, establish verification protocols, and to apply frameworks that prevent both missile proliferation and untargeted missile attacks.

Major Parties Involved

The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)

The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) is the primary source of ballistic missile proliferation in the Middle East. While still lacking a modern and advanced air force due to harsh budgets and decades of international trade sanctions, Iran effectively learnt that ballistic missiles are a relatively strong and cost-effective weapon to either attack or defend.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Consisting of Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, the GCC is a significant player in regional security. Several of these countries have been affected by missile and drone attacks over the years, leading the countries to invest more into strengthening their missile defence systems and call for international actions to prevent and permanently stop the spread and proliferation of ballistic missiles in the region.

Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)

The MTCR is a partnership between several countries that joined to prevent the spread of missile technology capable of creating weapons of mass destruction. However, the MTCR cannot enforce its guidelines legally, since the partnership only coordinates and controls exports among its member countries and limits the transfer of sensitive missile technologies globally.

United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

The UNSC is in charge of maintaining peace and security internationally. This committee has addressed the issue of ballistic missile proliferation in the past through two resolutions, one discussed in 2015 and the other in 2026. The council continues to encourage non-proliferation measures, encourage diplomacy, and reduce regional tensions.

United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

The UNSC has attempted to establish legal frameworks and enforce stability; however, these measures face constant establishment challenges. The issue regarding the use of ballistic missiles remains to this day and has received two resolutions to be discussed by the Security Council.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event
1980-1988	Iran-Iraq war (War of the cities). Both countries used ballistic missiles to attack major cities in both countries, showing their military's importance and strength and encouraging missile development all around the middle east. This was like a starting point for the proliferation to begin.
1987	Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). The MTCR was created to decrease the spread of ballistic missile technologies that where capable of creating weapons of mass destruction.
1991	The Gulf war. In this war Iraq launched Scud missiles at Saudi Arabia and Israel. This was the war that created the begging of the concern over ballistic missile use in the middle east and where countries started to invest more into their defence systems.
2002	Hague Code of Conduct (HCoC). The HCoC was introduced to encourage transparency and reduce the spread of ballistic missiles through voluntary international cooperations.
9 July 2010	UN Security Council Resolution 1929. The UN placed restrictions on Iran's ballistic missile activities. And increased sanctions related to missile development.
20 July 2015	UN Security Council Resolution 2231. This resolution supported the JCPOA and called on Iran not to develop, and missiles could include nuclear weapons.
2023-2025	Regional Missile Escalation. Increased missile attacks between Iran and non-governmental regional armed groups. These groups highlighted their military development through ballistic missiles.
11 March 2026	UN Security Council Resolution 2817. The Security Council (SC) condemned Iranian missile attacks on multiple middle eastern nations and called for a direct end to the attacks.

Attempts to solve the issue

UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004)

UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) requires all member states to enforce and establish laws to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile

systems that are capable of delivering them to non-states. It also adds to strengthen export control as well as border control and security to prevent the illegal transfer of ballistic missile technologies and any related missile materials. However, the resolution does not directly regulate and monitor the development or use of ballistic missiles by the member states, but it only addresses non-member state actors.

UN Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015)

UN Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015) approved the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and implemented restrictions on Iran's ballistic missile use and the transfer of ballistic missile technologies. It called on Iran to cease activities related to ballistic missiles capable of carrying or delivering any nuclear weapons and required the Security Council's (SC) approval for certain missile-related transfers. However, the resolution primarily focused on Iran and its missile capabilities, and many of the missile-related restrictions were only for a limited time, leaving the issue of ballistic missile proliferation in the Middle East still not solved.

Possible Solutions

Subtopic 1:

Encourage regional weapon control agreements: By encouraging Middle Eastern countries to reach negotiations that create limits towards the use of ballistic missile testing and deployment. This will lower tension in the region and promote regional stability. However, challenges will be faced when promoting negotiations between Middle Eastern countries.

Subtopic 2:

Strengthen civilian protection and humanitarian response mechanisms: improve warning systems, emergency response organization, and the protection of important civilian infrastructure to reduce casualties and improve recovery after ballistic missile strikes.

Subtopic 3:

Strengthen international export control: By strengthening export controls internationally on missile components and technologies, this will decrease the spread and proliferation of missiles in the region, creating stability.

Create a UN monitoring system in the region: By creating a monitoring system to inspect, monitor, and record any data about the testing and the manufacturing of ballistic missiles in the region. This will increase stability and transparency throughout the region.

Guiding questions

1. Does my country test or develop ballistic missiles?
2. Is my country included in any international weapon control partnership or non-proliferation agreement?
3. Has my country had to deal with the effects of a ballistic missile in the past or in recent conflicts?
4. How could increased ballistic missile proliferation affect my country economically and socially?
5. Has my country ever proposed to prevent the proliferation of ballistic missiles? If so, what are

they?

6. Is my country in the region where the proliferation and use of ballistic missiles is happening?
7. Is my country allied with any countries in the MENA region that are affected by the proliferation and use of ballistic missiles? If so, how can my country help out the country?
8. What military measures has my country taken to decrease the tensions in the Middle East?
9. What diplomatic measures has my country taken to decrease the tensions in the Middle East?
10. Has my country either supported or opposed any of the UN's attempts to find a solution to this crisis?

Appendix

- https://digitallibrary.un.org/?ln=en
- https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/2231/ballistic-missile-related-transfers-and-activities
- https://www.armscontrol.org
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