

THE PROJECT ON MANAGING THE ATOM

A WMD-FREE ZONE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

PAOLO FORADORI AND MARTIN B. MALIN, EDITORS



HARVARD Kennedy School

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Cover Photos

Upper Left: Members of the UN investigation team take samples from the ground in the Damascus countryside of Zamalka, Syria on August 29, 2013 as part of the on-going process of dismantling Syria’s stockpile of chemical weapons (AP Photo/Local Committee of Arbeen). Upper Right: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel describes his concerns over Iran’s nuclear ambitions during his address to the United Nations on September 27, 2012 (AP Photo/Richard Drew). Lower Left: UNITN | © Eyematrix_Images–Fotolia.com, Lower Right: Middle East satellite map from Wikipedia.

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Introduction: A WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East, From the Outside Looking In

Martin B. Malin and Steven E. Miller

The 2015 Review Conference for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) appears to be headed for an impasse. At issue is the failure to make any tangible progress toward establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. Tension over this arose at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, when the states of the Arab League insisted on the adoption of a resolution that called upon states to take practical steps toward the establishment of zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction; in return, the Arab League supported the indefinite extension of the NPT, whose future was then being negotiated. What followed, however, was 15 years of inaction, during which time there was no attention to this issue, no visible progress whatsoever, and no apparent intent on the part of the United States, Britain, and Russia—the NPT depository states that had pushed for indefinite extension—to fulfill this obligation.

Feeling betrayed, at the 2010 NPT Review Conference the Arab League states demanded a new resolution that revived this commitment, called for specific action, and set a deadline. Failing this, the Arab League would guarantee the failure of the 2010 conference by rejecting its final document. After tense and intensive negotiations, the desire for a successful conference ultimately prevailed over the evident reluctance of some parties (notably the United States) to accede to the demand for action in the Middle East. The 2010 NPT Review Conference adopted a provision that called upon the United States, Russia, and Great Britain, together with the Secretary General of the United Nations to convene a conference, in 2012, on establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles in the Middle East. Member states celebrated the proposal as the first significant commitment to a specific plan of action for the Middle East. However, grounds for optimism proved short-lived and this new initiative led to more disappointment: the deadline was missed and no conference was held. At the end of 2012, the conveners announced its indefinite postponement and offered no plan for rescheduling.

Feeling again betrayed, Arab diplomats in particular were exasperated over the cancellation. The repeated and protracted disregard for commitments made to the group of Arab states and the refusal to respect Arab state interests and preferences has produced friction and has complicated the politics of managing the NPT system. In the latest expression of Arab displeasure, in April 2013, at a preparatory meeting for the upcoming NPT Review Conference, Egypt staged a walkout in protest of the “unacceptable and continuous failure” to make progress on the WMD-free zone issue. The Arab League—representing 22 NPT members and a powerful bloc within the Nonaligned Movement that makes up a majority of NPT member states—demanded that the postponed WMD-free zone conference be held in 2013, and has threatened to block consensus at the 2015 NPT Review Conference unless it is.¹ The UN-appointed facilitator for the conference, Finnish diplomat Jaakko Laajava, has continued to meet with parties in the region to work toward rescheduling the conference, but thus far there has been no date set and apparently there is no agreement among

¹ “Working paper submitted by Tunisia on behalf of the States members of the League of Arab States,” NPT/CONF.2015/PC.II/WP.34, April 19, 2013.

the parties on what should be discussed.

As the diplomatic atmosphere surrounding the issue deteriorated, our colleague Paolo Foradori asked a group of distinguished experts and diplomats from across the Middle East for their respective views on the proposal to launch a process aimed at creating a WMD-free zone in the region. How significant is this proposal given violence and turmoil rocking the Middle East? What problems would it solve? What are the consequences of a continuing failure to initiate arms control discussions in the Middle East? How can the process be salvaged? The short essays he received in response provide a remarkably vivid snap shot of the diversity of views on the issue. The contributors discuss the prevalent aspirations for non-proliferation and disarmament in the Middle East, as well as frustrations over the failure to make progress toward those goals. Taken together, the essays also demonstrate the scale and complexity of the challenges associated with establishing a WMD-free zone in the region. The gaps between the positions of key parties are clearly evident here; but the reader will also find unexpected commonalities.

Aspirations and Frustrations

The aspiration to arrive at cooperative means of eliminating dangerous weapons in the region is shared by all participants. Wael Al-Assad, who coordinates the arms control and disarmament positions of Arab League members, suggests that “the proposed Middle East WMD-free zone will open doors for cooperation and security dialogue among the states of the region, and thereby induce an atmosphere of trust that should help any efforts towards real peace.” Nasser Hadian and Shani Hormozi from Iran observe that “the current controversy over the Iranian nuclear program does not change Tehran’s position that a zone free of WMD in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East region is a desirable and beneficial objective for national and regional security.” Israeli analysts Emily Landau and Shimon Stein agree that “collectively working on security relations in the Middle East would have clear benefits for all regional parties.”

But these aspirations are coupled with genuine fears and frustrations at the lack of progress toward creating a zone. Several contributors in this collection offer sharp criticism for what they see as the conveners’ failure to fulfill the obligations they accepted in negotiations at the 2010 NPT Review Conference. Sameh Aboul-Enein, from Egypt, suggests that “what is lacking...is the requisite political will, commitment, and sense of urgency on the part of the conveners.” Nasser Saghafi-Ameri, from Iran, notes in his essay that the cancellation of the 2012 conference was “perceived across the region as a U.S. initiative.” The failure, he notes, “damages the foundations of trust that are necessary for any disarmament initiative.” Prince Turki Al Faisal, a former Saudi ambassador to the United States characterizes the US manner of addressing this issue “shameful and cavalier.”

Complex Challenges

The proposal to establish a WMD-free zone in the Middle East faces enormous obstacles. The foundations of trust to which Saghafi-Ameri refers to are weak indeed. The region is home to one of the four non-parties to the NPT, Israel, which is believed to possess a nuclear arsenal, and with which the majority of the states of the region have no diplomatic relations. While not opposed in principle to regional security discussions, Israel is deeply skeptical that in current circumstances a conference on a WMD-free zone will be constructive or at all helpful to Israel’s interests. Furthermore, the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons is a prominent feature

of the region's violent history; the most troublesome violations of the NPT have occurred in the region, in Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. Iran's nuclear ambitions remain an urgent concern. And the current discussion of a WMD-free zone is taking place as civil war in Syria, including the apparent repeated use of chemical weapons, and the violent counter-revolution in Egypt have plunged the entire region into a period of great uncertainty.

From their respective national vantage points, the authors collectively identify a diverse set of problems, and imbue the proposed WMD-free zone with an equally diverse set of envisioned benefits. Arslan Chikhaoui, from Algeria, focuses on how a WMD-free zone might be instrumental in preventing terrorist use of nuclear, radiological, biological, or chemical weapons, and facilitate Algeria's energy development plans. Ahmed Saif, considers how a WMD-free zone in the Middle East might help to address threats to Yemen's failing state institutions, by preventing the acquisition of WMD by Iranian-backed Huthi rebels or by al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula. Prince Turki Al Faisal proposes negotiations over a zone as the best way of containing the Iranian nuclear threat. Hadian and Hormozi suggest that working toward a zone would help build confidence in the region regarding Iran's nuclear intentions, and would also enhance Iranian security by adding additional monitoring and verification in other states in the region. Several of the contributors suggest that Israeli nuclear weapons are the principal danger that the zone could address.

Even in a peaceful region, formally banning all weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles, would involve complex technical and political challenges. Mohammed Shaker, thinking in broad regional terms, examines a number of the key issues yet to be worked out among the parties in the Middle East to establish a WMD-free zone. These issues include determining the states to be included in the zone, defining the weapons and delivery vehicles to be banned, negotiating the obligations states in the region will undertake and the external security guarantees that would underpin those obligations, and developing the special verification arrangements that would be needed. These are difficult issues, but, as Shaker suggests, "the time has come to think aloud" about challenges ahead.

Gaps and Commonalities

The suggestions about the way ahead contained here at times highlight the gaps that Ambassador Laajava has struggled to bridge. Key parties disagree on fundamental questions including how to approach the problem of arms control. Landau and Stein stress the need for improving *regional* political relations before moving forward with a *regional* arms control agenda. They envision a process that would initially be divorced entirely from the NPT. By contrast, Egypt in particular, but others in the region as well, see Israeli nuclear capabilities as the major problem to be tackled, not so much for immediate relief from a regional threat (though Israeli nuclear weapons are also perceived as such), but also for the sake of the NPT. As Aboul-Enein frames the problem, establishing a Middle East WMD-free zone "constitutes the fourth pillar of the NPT regime." One might describe this as a dialogue of the deaf, except the parties are not in dialogue and cannot agree on how to begin one.

Yet, despite these differences, the respective prescriptions for a way forward overlap in ways that reinforce the notion that creative thinking could perhaps yield progress. Landau and Stein themselves recognize the need for "adjusting attitudes in Israel" that have until now not allowed

for any regional discussion of controlling WMD. They propose establishing a standing forum for conducting a “regional security dialogue,” the agenda for which would include both comprehensive regional security issues and the issue of WMD. Whether the Israeli government would accept Landau and Stein’s proposal, and try to advance it within the framework of the proposed WMD-free zone conference is uncertain. Nevertheless, Wael Al-Assad seems to open up space for more a more comprehensive agenda when he points out that “peace and the [WMD-free] zone are mutually reinforcing but neither should be a precondition for the other.” Even more pointedly, Prince Turki Al Faisal suggests that peace “should be resolved through the discussions and diplomacy to be deployed to establish the zone.”

There is also a widely shared view that developing regional verification mechanisms could help to build confidence on the way to the establishment of a zone, and could provide additional assurance to the parties within the zone once it is established. Mahmoud Nasreddine draws important lessons on regional verification from the examples of the European Atomic Energy Community and Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials, and recommends the establishment of a regional inspection and verification agency. Former Israeli Atomic Energy Commission Director General, Gideon Frank, has elsewhere described the advantages of regional verification and mutual inspections.² Shaker and Khalil, among others in this collection, also endorse regional verification measures.

Finally, one additional bright spot is the recognition, expressed by at least a subset of authors, that nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons offer little to no demonstrable political or security benefit to those who possess them. Ayman Khalil notes that the interest in deterrence has motivated the pursuit of nuclear capabilities in the Middle East. He points out that for Israel, the only state to have acquired nuclear weapons, the strategy has failed to prevent military confrontation on several occasions. Hadian and Hormozi outline several reasons why weapons of mass destruction would undermine Iranian national security, including the problem of proliferation and the loss of conventional superiority, the risk of WMD terrorism, the further institutionalization of a U.S. presence in the Gulf, the financial cost, the damage to regional political relations, and the difficulty of maintaining command and control in a compact region with little to no reaction time.

Despair is close to the surface for those who follow this issue. The failure to convene the WMD-free conference in 2012, as promised, is a significant setback and bodes ill for upcoming NPT diplomacy in the years immediately ahead. Progress seems stymied: key players are not on board and key issues are unresolved. The logjam has so far proven intractable, with the strong advocacy by the Arab states juxtaposed against the deep skepticism and reluctance of Israel, the United States, and perhaps others. But although the challenges of banning weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East are enormous, and the persistence of the problem threatens both the people of the region the stability of the non-proliferation regime itself, the cumulative effect of reading these essays is anything but despair. Engaging with the constructive approaches presented here is an excellent way of moving the issue onto a less damaging and potentially useful path.

² Gideon Frank, “IAEA Safeguards and International Security” International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA-SM-367/18/04), online at <http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/ss-2001/PDF%20files/Session%2018/Paper%2018-04.pdf>

The Middle East WMD-Free Zone: A View from Algeria

Arslan Chikhaoui

Algeria's position on nuclear and WMD proliferation must be understood in the context of, on the one hand, the country's commitment to both nuclear non-proliferation and the on-going struggle against chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism in North Africa, and, on the other hand, its development of a civil nuclear program. Algeria's policy direction is supportive of a Middle East WMD-free zone, leaving open the possibility of North African regional participation to bolster the initiative.

Algeria's Situation

As a state of the MENA region, Algeria is openly committed to the fight against the acquisition and dissemination of weapons of mass destruction. This position is tied to a number of historical and political reasons: Algeria has suffered, and continues to suffer, from the effects of the French nuclear tests in 1962–1963 in the Algerian Sahara (Aïn Necker and Aïn Salah in particular). In addition, though not covered by WMD conventions, Algerians suffered attacks with incendiary weapons (napalm) during their war of independence (1954-1962). There remain hundreds of kilometres of antipersonnel mines along the east and west borders. More recently, during the 1990s, Islamist radicals tried to use biological weapons against populations and infrastructure through poisoning of water towers and dams to the east of the capital Algiers.¹

The Algerian economy has a number of vulnerabilities to terrorist attacks: the country's hydrocarbon infrastructure – such as its West and East petrochemical zones, its oil and gas fields in the South (Sahara), as well as its oil and gas pipelines network – is a particular cause of concern due to the concentration of facilities. For these reasons, Algerian public opinion and the Algerian authorities have consistently been aware of the importance of protection and the fight against these types of terrorist threats.

On the nuclear side, Algeria has two experimental nuclear reactors for civil and scientific use, in Draria and Aïn Oussera, which are subject to regular controls of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Algeria has made use of civil nuclear energy in research projects in the fields of health, agriculture and water. Moreover, Algeria developed national legislation and regulation to manage the risks attendant to a civilian nuclear program at an early stage, particularly focusing on civil nuclear safety in industry and nuclear medicine because of the experience in the 1970s in Sétif of radiation effects on the population from welding control devices.

The reality of developing electronuclear plants is imminent, greatly helped by the availability of uranium deposits in the Algerian Sahara. For these reasons, and to prepare for the post-oil era, in 2007 Algeria concluded nuclear cooperation agreements with both the United States and France and also renewed ones signed in the mid-1980s with Argentina and China. It plans to acquire, in 2020, a first nuclear plant for electricity production and intends to buy one every five years following.

¹ Personal communication with Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Mohamed Lamari, 3 February 2003

Commitment to Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Convinced of the goals of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, Algeria signed the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1995. Furthermore, following approval from the Board of Governors of the IAEA, it undertook to sign the additional protocol, although this is still under negotiation.

On this subject, Susan Burk, special envoy of President Obama in charge of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, on a visit to Algeria in February 2010 stated that Algeria and the United States share the same opinion on the reinforcement of NPT, based on 3 elements: nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. She also expressed support for the Algerian civil nuclear program, and described Algeria as an important partner with which the United States intends to work closely, to move forward all commitments within the framework of the NPT.²

In terms of doctrine regarding the nuclear issue, Algeria advocates for:

- A non-discriminatory and non-selective approach to NPT implementation;
- Security guarantees for non-nuclear weapon states;
- Reinforcement of the implementation of Article I of the NPT, in which the states parties are committed not to help, encourage, or induce the non-nuclear weapons states to acquire such weapons in any way whatsoever;
- Acceleration of the process of entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty;
- Recognition of nuclear energy as available to all states as a means of development and progress in the scientific and energy fields.

Defense Against CBRN Terrorism

Algeria signed and ratified the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) in 1975 and the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1995. Algeria has a huge network of biological, veterinary, and agronomic schools and faculties, the most important one being the biological faculty of the University of Algiers where researchers are fellows or corresponding members of the American Biological Society. With respect to pharmaceuticals, Algeria has developed a laboratory with international standards which is used by the World Health Organization (WHO) for the registration of all medicines produced in or intended for Africa. Moreover, the national police force has its own forensic laboratories and the National Gendarmerie has the world-class Institute for Criminal Evidence and Criminology .

Awareness of the real threats of terrorism linked to CBRN weapons started in the early 1990s. According to intelligence sources, the first attempted attack in Algeria in 1994 was aimed at contaminating the drinking water reservoirs using the botulinum toxin.³ This was followed, thanks to Algerian-British intelligence cooperation, by the dismantling of the terrorist network planning a

² Interview with former Prime Minister Smail Hamdani, 7 September 2010

³ Personal communication with MoD CoS Maj. Gen. Lamari, 3 February 2003

ricin attack in the London Underground in January 2003,⁴ and further arrests throughout Europe.⁵ Furthermore, several intelligence reports indicate that Al Qaida in the Maghreb has made multiple attempts to manufacture poison, gas, biological agents, and radioactive materials, and that it has training camps specialized in biological and chemical field, particularly in the Sahel area.⁶

The authorities have had to remain alert about CBRN terrorism precisely because Algeria has faced these numerous problems. However, compared to those created in the nuclear field, national controls of sensitive biological and chemical materials are weak, primarily due to the priority given to fighting conventional terrorism. Although there is already a compulsory health quality control provided by specialized national and international agencies regulating the import and export of food products and pharmaceuticals, the building of preventive, scientific, and judicial capacities to fight the threat of chemical and biological proliferation to terrorist networks remains imperfect. With growth of the industry coming only very recently, Algeria has not yet developed comprehensive regulations to prevent possible terrorist acquisition of biological and chemical weapons. This situation is now being addressed by an inter-ministerial committee charged with capacity-building in this area – the committee has been charged with setting laws and regulations for biological agents, particularly concerning regulating the implementation of import, export, holding, purchase, and transport of pathogenic agents and toxins.

The new bio-terrorist threat, described as a third generation threat, is currently addressed by the High National Security Council. Algeria believes that the response must be a coordinated one and consequently mobilizes a wide variety of human and material resources, and involves several departments: the Prime Minister's Office, National Defense, Interior, Finance, Health, and Foreign Affairs. Authorities have undertaken the protection of water distribution networks by strengthening site security and intruder monitoring, while also setting botulinum toxin detection tests and strengthening the physical protection and security of the pharmaceutical production sites and biological laboratories. Moreover, in late September 2010, Algeria set up a Regional Intelligence Center in Algiers, bringing together the countries of the region to fight against terrorism in all its forms, including CBRN trafficking.

The WMD-Free Zone

From the above commentary it is clear that not only is the WMD-free zone in the Middle East region in the interest of Algeria but through its actions it supports such an idea. Algeria has already signed and ratified the treaty of Pelindaba, establishing a nuclear weapons free Zone on the African continent and since 2009 has participated in the creation of the African Committee on Nuclear Energy compliance and verification mechanism of this treaty. Furthermore, Algeria is compliant with and committed to UN Security Council Resolution 1540, according to which it is working on domestic legislation governing all aspects of WMD proliferation. Establishing a Middle East WMD-free zone is a principle shared by policymakers and Algeria supports any initiative that would seek to extend such a zone to include the North African region if this were deemed to be

⁴ Jeffrey M. Bale, Anjali Bhattacharjee, Eric Croddy, Richard Pilch, "Ricin Found in London: An al-Qa'ida Connection?" CNS Reports, (February 2008); online: <http://cns.miis.edu/reports/ricin.htm>

⁵ Craig S. Smith, "French Seize 2 Algerians in Terrorist Inquiry," The New York Times, May 15, 2004; online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/15/world/french-seize-2-algerians-in-terrorist-inquiry.html>

⁶ Personal communication with MoD CoS Maj. Gen. Lamari, 7 March 2004

useful by all states.

Algeria's principles are based on the following:

- A non-discriminatory and non-selective approach to the implementation of all relevant treaties governing WMD development and use;
- Security guarantees for states not possessing WMD;
- Prevention of the acquisition or use of CBRN weapons by malevolent actors;
- Confidence building measures and verification with respect to state sovereignty.

Moreover, Algeria has undertaken efforts to raise public awareness on biological and chemical threats and build capacities for response and mitigation in the event of an attack, including exercises involving a multitude of crisis-management stakeholders. Awareness-building on bio-safety and bio-security best practices has even been implemented through university bioscience curriculums. It has also implemented legislation to regulate civil sector biological research involving high-risk agents.

As far as there is a concern about CBRN threats, Algerian policymakers are looking to develop international and regional cooperation on the following points:

- To set up the necessary legislation and regulation to prevent and fight nuclear, biological, and chemical risks and accidents according to standard CBRN defense;
- Intelligence sharing and exchange of experiences in terms of combat CBRN terrorism;
- Crisis management, in response to a potential CBRN terrorist attack;
- To raise awareness of the importance of safety, security, safeguards;
- To set up global CBRN forensic analysis and response capabilities.

Algeria is aware that the MENA region presents a complex political environment for controlling CBRN weapons. However, policymakers trust that a common ground for productive exchange and cooperation exists. It is therefore the case that Algeria supports the regional dialogue potential of the proposed Helsinki Conference, and as a MENA state would willingly participate to fulfil the zone's promise of regional security and safety.

Making Progress on the Middle East Nuclear- and WMD-Free Zone: Egypt's NPT Pillar

*Sameh Aboul-Enein**

This paper addresses three issues, namely: the changed political dynamics that make the Middle East WMD-free zone issue more salient than ever; the implications of these changes for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Middle East conference; and finally, the impact of current developments in the Middle East on the 2015 NPT Review Conference.

The Current Situation

Almost two decades have elapsed since the 1995 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Review and Extension Conference adopted a resolution on the Middle East that called for the establishment of a WMD-Free Zone in the region. The resolution was an integral, inextricable part of the fundamental deal around the indefinite extension of the treaty. For many States, it also constitutes the fourth pillar of the NPT regime, which is one reason why many States parties feel aggrieved with the lack of progress and the apparent low priority given to the matter prior to 2010. Unfortunately, to this day, no practical steps have been taken to implement this resolution.

In spite of the fact that the NPT Review Conference in 2010 presented a way forward towards adopting by consensus an action plan on the Middle East, and notwithstanding Amb. Jaakko Laajava's efforts to hold this conference, it is important to acknowledge that little progress has been achieved in the three years since and that there has been scant evidence of the conveners to placing the required high priority and commitment on the convening of the conference, in accordance with the timeline and the mandate established by the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

It is important that concerned policymakers outside the region do not underestimate the level of frustration that has built up around this issue over time. The implementation of the 1995 Middle East resolution is crucial to the health of the non-proliferation regime. Restoring confidence in this process will require State representatives to approach the issue in a manner that respects the principle of equal commitment to regional and global security, implementation of critical commitments, and the creation of a regime that at its roots, and in the longer term, is unambiguously non-discriminatory.

The "Arab Spring" has without a doubt changed existing fundamental dynamics and has had significant implications on the political and security settings in the Middle East. Although the Arab Spring has undoubtedly affected the short-run capacity of states to engage constructively on the non-proliferation and disarmament agenda, in the longer run it could be a positive game-changer. Public opinion is already playing a much more significant and prominent role in Arab societies and in this respect will have a fundamental role in the formulation of disarmament and security issues. Arab governments are becoming more accountable to their people and foreign policy is falling more in line with domestic aspirations and a reflection of popular demands. Parliaments, with their foreign affairs, Arab affairs and National Security committees, are already playing and expected

*The views expressed in this paper are exclusively the author's personal views, in his private and academic capacity.

to play an increasing role in foreign policy issues, in which nuclear issues will receive, without a doubt, considerable attention. In this context, public opinion in Egypt and in many Arab capitals is dismayed at the lack of progress on holding the conference on the Middle East to this date.

Preparations for the Middle East Conference

After two PrepCom meetings leading to the 2015 NPT Review Conference, the facilitator has had little to report in line with the 2010 action plan. Yet there is a need to enter directly into a phase of substantive and procedural preparation for the Middle East WMD-free zone conference itself. To begin on a positive note, a number of imaginable difficulties can in fact be easily overcome: the 1995 Resolution and the 2010 action plan already provide clear guidance on the mandate of the conference; the Rules of Procedure can be adapted from the NPT review process (as the 1995 resolution and the 2010 action plan emanate from the NPT review process), or alternatively from the rules of procedure of the UN General Assembly; the facilitator is already appointed and has been working for over a year and the venue also is already identified as Helsinki; internationally agreed principles exist on the establishment of nuclear weapon-free zones (NWFZs) which have been subscribed to by all States in the region of the Middle East through the UN General Assembly and the UN Disarmament Commission; the zone of application is defined and accepted as reflected in various UN and IAEA documentation, thus the States of the region of the Middle East are clearly identified, and the delimitation of a Middle East WMD-free zone is well known; and the nature of obligations under a NWFZ are also quite clear, as are the obligations pursuant to the global treaties prohibiting biological and chemical weapons. What is lacking, though, is the requisite political will, commitment, and sense of urgency on the part of the conveners to deliver on their 1995 and 2010 commitments. NPT States, in particular the States of the region of the Middle East, have been awaiting fulfillment of such obligations since 1995. How much longer must they wait?

The conference sponsors should take the lead in launching a sustained and serious process involving specific concrete steps and measures to be taken within specific time-frames. Furthermore, this process must seek to convene the conference as soon as possible, prior to the 2014 session of the NPT Preparatory Committee, and to link the outcome and related developments to the successive sessions of the Preparatory Committee, ultimately leading to a report on the result of the conference to the 2015 NPT Review Conference (as mandated in 2010). While limited progress has been made, there is still a need for intensified work in order to finalize the agenda and various modalities, including preparation for how the issues of verification and compliance should be addressed. What will be the mechanisms and which institutions will be entrusted with this responsibility? What will be the implications of non-compliance? Furthermore, other issues such as security guarantees, the inalienable right to cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy (in line with Article IV of the NPT), and nuclear safety/security are in need of elaboration as well.¹

It is essential, and required pursuant to the 2010 mandate, that participation in the Middle East Conference should be inclusive: the conference should include Israel, Iran, and the members of the League of Arab States, as well as the nuclear weapon States and other relevant international organizations such as the IAEA, the OPCW, CTBTO, UN-ODA, the NPT Chair, and the BTWC

¹ Sameh Aboul-Enein and Hassan ElBahtimy, "Towards a verified nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East", VERTIC Brief, 11 April 2010, <http://www.vertic.org/media/assets/Publications/VB11.pdf>

ad hoc mechanism.²

The remaining session of the Preparatory Committee (in 2014) should review a roadmap based on the reports of the facilitator and the outcome of the Middle East WMD-free zone Conference. Evaluation of the views of NPT member states regarding the progress made towards establishing the zone should be an integral part of the report of the Preparatory Committee and of the facilitator to the 2015 NPT Review Conference.

The Broader Security Implications for the NPT Regime

The continuing lack of implementation of the 1995 resolution is bound have serious consequences, not only for the future of proliferation within the region, but also for the credibility of the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime in its entirety. This failure to make progress is now increasingly perceived as a breach of faith and commitment on the part of the depositary states and the conveners of the conference.³

To minimize any negative impact on the NPT regime, the depositary states that co-sponsored the 1995 Resolution, and the UN Secretary General with the assistance of the facilitator, must assume special responsibility and take visible and concrete steps on the implementation of the 1995 resolution and the 2010 action plan on the Middle East. To maintain credibility, the conveners must honor their commitments and hold the conference without any further delay.

If nothing is done, it is safe to assume that the Arab stance at the 2014 Preparatory Committee and at the 2015 Review Conference will be the subject of re-examination and re-evaluation. Although the League of Arab States has no desire or interest in undermining the integrity of nuclear non-proliferation in the region, the Arab States cannot be expected, particularly by those that possess nuclear weapons or sit securely under a nuclear umbrella, to continue to sacrifice their security indefinitely and idly stand by while other states ignore key commitments and undermine the regime.

The Middle East cannot be an exception to the Global Zero campaign. Israel remains the only state in the Middle East that has not yet become a party to the NPT and the only State in the region with a nuclear-weapon capability, and therefore Israel's accession to the Treaty as a non-nuclear-weapon State remains central to achieving the goal of universal adherence to the Treaty in the Middle East. The example of South Africa unilaterally renouncing its nuclear weapons and acceding to the NPT and the Pelindaba Treaty as a non-nuclear-weapon State (NNWS) beckons Israel. Another example that can be examined is the bilateral model of the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC).

The fundamental role of the NPT must be reinforced in order to achieve nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, particularly in the Middle East. This is why NPT universality is a pressing issue; it is simply unsustainable to expect NPT members to exercise indefinite restraint, and take on ever-increasing burdens to prove peaceful use, while universality languishes and nuclear disarmament remains a distant goal. Nuclear disarmament in the Middle East should also take place within the framework of the 1995 Middle East resolution and as agreed in the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review

² Sameh Aboul-Enein, "NPT 2010: The Beginning of a New Constructive Cycle," *Arms Control Today*, November 2010, http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2010_11/Aboul-Enein

³ Sameh Aboul-Enein, "Challenges for the Non-Proliferation Regime and the Middle East," *Disarmament Diplomacy*, Spring 2009.

Conferences, and thus would contribute to global nuclear disarmament efforts.

Conclusion

In moving forward, it is necessary to reiterate the following points, which must be recognized by the international community as a whole and the NPT depository states in particular, as the basis for progress. Egypt and many other states consider the creation of the Middle East WMD-free zone as the fourth pillar of the NPT. The success of the nuclear- and WMD-free zone project therefore impacts heavily upon the continuing integrity of the NPT regime. Furthermore, the breach by the conveners in the implementation of the 2010 action plan's clear decision to hold a conference in 2012 is yet another failure to fulfill a key NPT commitment intimately connected to the indefinite extension of the NPT. Among the League of Arab States, Egypt's strong national statement of dissatisfaction with these repeated failures has been expressed by its withdrawal during the second week of proceedings from the second Preparatory Committee.⁴ There must be no more excuses for postponement of the conference – the need to fix an exact date must be recognized by all states and acted upon by those responsible for its coordination.

I believe that in preparation for the Middle East conference, the following technical provisions of the nuclear- and WMD-free zone in the Middle East should be addressed:

- Dismantling and destroying existing or remaining nuclear weapons capabilities, facilities, and devices under international verification mechanisms;
- Renouncing nuclear weapons through refraining from conducting indigenous development and activities related to nuclear weapons;
- Prohibiting the transit or stationing of any nuclear explosive devices in the zone;
- Prohibiting all nuclear explosive testing in the zone and promoting the role of the CTBTO in this regard;
- Using nuclear materials and facilities for peaceful purposes only, in accordance with the NPT;
- Placing all nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards;
- Establishing the necessary institutions, mechanisms, and entities to uphold such a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. and to address the issue of verification. This entails in particular, identifying the role of the IAEA and other relevant verification organizations within such a zone as the OPCW, CTBTO and the United Nations.

A more constructive approach towards engaging all the countries of the region is also required in order to guarantee their full participation in the conference. I still believe that the Middle East WMD-free zone conference and the process that follows should be inclusive to allow a more genuine, candid, and necessary interaction about nuclear disarmament, dismantlement, nuclear roll-back, non-proliferation, peaceful uses, transparency, accountability, and verification. Although the

⁴ Egypt's statement is available at: http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/pre-pcom13/statements/29April_Egypt.pdf

official process has been slow, there has been no shortage of academic and other non-governmental interest in this topic. In addition to the many officials with vast experience, a wealth of experts and resources is available that can be positively harnessed to ameliorate the political stalemate on the matter. The international community at large recognizes this fact and sees the positive possibilities that can come from a genuine commencement to the implementation of the 1995 Middle East resolution on a nuclear- and WMD-free zone in the region. This effort is crucial not only for peace and security in the region of the Middle East, but also to facilitate the work of the 2014 NPT Preparatory Committee and the 2015 NPT Review Conference.

A WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East: Iran's Security Imperatives

Nasser Hadian and Shani Hormozi

It is in Iran's national interest to promote the Helsinki Conference and vigorously seek the implementation of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. This paper outlines the ways in which weapons of mass destruction do not enhance Iran's security and, rather, would increase its vulnerabilities. It then examines why a Middle East WMD-free zone would be in Iran's national interest. The paper concludes by suggesting that the longstanding Iranian support and activity for the WMD-free zone in the Middle East will likely be strengthened by the election of Hassan Rouhani as president of Iran.

Background

The 2010 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) proposed a regional gathering to be held in 2012 on the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, including their delivery vehicles. The establishment of such a zone in the Middle East is the ultimate tool for improving the mutual security of all states, thus drastically reducing the regional security dilemma.

Iran has long supported the creation of a Middle East nuclear weapon-free zone. In 1970 Iran signed and ratified the NPT and in 2003 voluntarily signed and implemented an Additional Protocol to its safeguards agreement with the IAEA. The current controversy over the Iranian nuclear program does not change Tehran's position that a zone free of WMD in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East region is a desirable and beneficial objective for national and regional security. There are a number of reasons that illustrate why Iran's possessing WMD is not only against its security interests, but also why a WMD-free zone in the Middle East is aligned with Iran's security interests.

Iran's Reasons for Opposing WMD

On a fundamental level, acquiring WMD implies security contradictions for Iran. There are several reasons and factors explaining Iran's refraining from acquiring WMD, including the following:

Losing conventional superiority

In the event of WMD acquisition by Iran – which would likely be followed by WMD proliferation in the region, including Iran's neighbors – Iranian conventional superiority, which emanates from elements such as its conventional arms, population, vast surface area, and geopolitical situation, would be severely weakened.

Emergence of WMD terrorism

Apart from the risk of efforts by other states to acquire WMD, the prospect that extremist and terrorist groups may gain access to such weapons is another threat which should be treated very seriously indeed. Despite America's long geographical distance from al-Qaeda's headquarters and

possession of sophisticated equipment to detect such arms, it is clear that the threat of al-Qaeda and other radical terrorist groups having access to WMD along the borders of Iran is a great danger for the Islamic Republic. In fact, both from logistical and ideological viewpoints, the likelihood of the use of WMD against Iran by radical groups is higher than such an attack on the U.S.

Institutionalization of the American presence in the region

Iranian acquisition of WMD, especially nuclear weapons, would lead to a feeling of an Iranian threat by regional countries and could push them closer to the U.S. This in turn would strengthen and stabilize the U.S.' presence in the region. It is also possible that regional states, due to the way a WMD-armed Iran would be perceived, would move towards forming regional military alliances with or without the U.S.

The risk of offensive rather than defensive perceptions

Iranian acquisition of WMD, even in the context of a defensive strategy with the aim of deterrence, can lead to different perceptions by its neighbors in the region. The perceptions of other states would not be necessarily defensive – in other words, they may perceive offensive intentions from Iran's defensive strategy. This offensive perception would provoke Iran's neighbors to boost their military capacity, further destabilizing the security environment of the Middle East.

Vulnerability to production and maintenance costs of WMD

Production and maintenance of WMD requires considerable investment. High expenditure in this regard would be followed by investment cuts in other sectors, leading to a weakening of the economic potential of the whole country.

The risk of weak communication network or command structure

Iran does not have a sophisticated communication network or command structure. Furthermore, Iran is well aware of the dangers of WMD for the security of all the nations in the Middle East. The most probable vehicle for use of such weapons would be missiles, and it would take only a few short minutes for these missiles to hit important sites in the targeted country. The relevant elites and government officials are knowledgeable about these facts and that such a situation for them would be a strategic nightmare that should be avoided at all costs.

Damaging Iranian ties with some regional and international actors

Iranian acquisition of WMD could impact Iranian ties with regional and international actors and darken or damage such relations. The perception of an Iranian threat could change the balance of relations at some levels and affect cooperation in some areas. Already Gulf Cooperation Council members have revised their security priorities and are moving towards modern arms procurement and strengthening their military capabilities due to their perceptions of an Iranian threat.

Religious prohibition of the acquiring of WMD

According to interpretations of Islam, the production, stockpiling, and use of WMD are religiously prohibited.¹ Based on such interpretations of Islam, weapons of mass destruction are religiously

¹ Ayatollah Khamene'i "Statement to the International Conference on Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation", Tehran, 17 April 2010, available at http://english.khamenei.ir/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1287

banned in Iran. The issue of the contradiction between acquisition of nuclear arms and Islamic teachings has been repeatedly and expressly stressed by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, who has said: “We believe that apart from nuclear arms, other types of WMD like chemical and biological [arms] pose serious threats against humanity. Being a victim itself of chemical weapons use, the Iranian nation feels more than any other nation the risk associated with production and stockpiling of such weapons. And it is ready to use all its possibilities for countering them. We consider using such weapons as *haraam* [unlawful], and struggling to protect mankind against this great affliction as a universal obligation.”²

Iran’s Reasons for Supporting a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East

Not only does Iran want to avoid weakening its security by possessing WMD, it also will try to enhance its security by supporting the proposal for a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. A number of reasons illustrate why Iran favors the creation of such a zone.

Confidence building

Considering international sentiments regarding Iran’s nuclear program, the creation of a WMD-free zone in the region would be a positive step toward diffusing tensions and building confidence, provided that the international community ensures that every member country agrees and complies with this proposal. Iran is willing to work towards building trust with its Arab neighbors to create a more cooperative regional security arrangement—but the first step should be based on serious dialogue. An initial confidence building measure could be forged between Iran and its Gulf neighbors: Iran would have no objection—in principle—to an agreement such as a Gulf WMD-free zone if it enhances the smaller Gulf States’ sense of security, providing that this was accepted as part of a greater effort toward a regional WMD-free zone.

Providing Iran with additional security value

Iran’s nuclear facilities are already under such surveillance that no regional arrangement can conceivably be more thorough or intrusive. To Iran, it is others who have reasons to be worried of such kinds of inspections. The creation of WMD-free zone means that other countries in the region would be under surveillance and monitoring as well; hence, such an agreement has an additional value for Iran’s security.

The issue of WMD delivery vehicles

Despite its opposition to WMD and support of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, Iran cannot give up its missile program. Asking Iran to stop or dismantle its missile program would simply not work. Considering the missile attacks on Iran during the Iran-Iraq war and the importance of missiles in defense policy, Iranian military planners are convinced that it is imperative for Iran to invest in missile research and development. Iran has successfully tested mid-range missiles such as the Shahab-3 and the Sejil.

&Itemid=16

² Ayatollah Khamene’i “Statement to the International Conference on Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation”, Tehran, 17 April 2010, available at http://english.khamenei.ir/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1287&Itemid=16

As part of a comprehensive deal to resolve disputes with the West and the United States, however, it is possible that Iran might be persuaded to cease developing longer-range missiles, or limit the deployment of its arsenals so they cannot reach sensitive areas in Israel and Europe. Iran and the West could agree on a verification regime to check and monitor missile deployments. Agreements along these lines could represent important confidence-building measures.

In sum, Iran makes an important distinction between non-proliferation measures for WMD and those relating to its missile program. Supporting a WMD-free zone in the Middle East enhances Iran's security interests, yet restricting missile programs increases its security vulnerability. In other words, it can be envisaged that Iran supports the establishment of verification regimes to check and monitor missile deployments in a comprehensive deal. The inclusion of delivery vehicles in the discussions of a WMD-free zone are thus an important aspect of the regional security arrangement.

Conclusions

Iran has long supported the creation of a Middle East free of WMD and is fully committed to promoting a stable security environment in the region. The current impasse in the P5+1 dialogue with Iran does not change the latter's position that a zone free of WMD in the Persian Gulf and wider Middle East is a desirable objective for regional security. Iran remains committed to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty—which Iran signed and ratified in 1970—as well as the Additional Protocols (AP), which were signed in 2003 and implemented voluntarily for more than two years. Thus, Iran would have no objection—in principle—to an agreement such as a Middle East free of WMD if it enhances security of everyone. Such an agreement, should it ever happen, would also be an important first step towards a more cooperative security arrangement between Iran, its neighbors, and the wider Middle East.

With the election of Hassan Rouhani as the new president of Iran, the chances of support for the Helsinki Conference will substantially increase. Being intimately involved in Iran's nuclear diplomacy, well informed of the nuances of the issue and its consequences for the security of the region, and running a campaign which featured Iran's nuclear program as a major issue, President Rouhani will lose no time in allocating sufficient resources to make the Helsinki Conference a success.

WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East Encounters New Challenges: A View from Tehran

Nasser Saghafi-Ameri

This paper discusses the scope of the proposed WMD-free zone in the Middle East, reviewing the history of the initial nuclear weapon-free zone (NWFZ) proposed by Iran. It also examines the contrasting policies of Israel and Iran with respect to the zone before advocating the placement of a regional solution within the broader goal of global nuclear disarmament in accordance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Scope of the Proposal

All countries in the Middle East, except Israel, welcomed the positive outcome of the 2010 NPT Review Conference to hold a conference in 2012 on the establishment of a WMD-free zone in their region. Helsinki was subsequently chosen as the site for the proposed conference. Israel made its rejection of the review conference's final document clear from the outset.¹ Apparently, that was enough to spark the eventual cancellation of the Conference, a move that was perceived across the region as a U.S. initiative and a setback to the efforts for establishing a nuclear free zone in the very volatile area of the Middle East.

The decision to cancel the Helsinki Conference (HC) disappointed many countries. Iran, in a statement, declared that "The U.S. has taken hostage this Helsinki conference for the sake of Israel ... they want to support the Israelis' nuclear weapon capability."² The UN General Assembly on December 4, 2012 — in what seemed to be not unrelated to the cancellation of the WMD-free zone — overwhelmingly approved a resolution that called on Israel to join the NPT "without further delay." The resolution also demanded that nuclear sites in Israel should be open to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). However, as before, Israel defiantly dismissed the resolution that was endorsed by the vote of 174 nations, calling it a "meaningless mechanical vote."³ Obviously, the postponement and vagueness about the fate of the HC may have profound implications for regional and global disarmament efforts, since it damages the foundations of trust that are necessary for any disarmament initiative. Furthermore, with the link that has been established between the HC and nuclear non-proliferation efforts in the framework of the NPT, the Conference now has greater significance than ever before.

¹ On the day after the final document of the 2010 NPT review conference was released, the Israeli prime minister stated: "As a non-signatory state of the NPT, Israel is not obligated by the decisions of this Conference, which has no authority over Israel, ... Given the distorted nature of this resolution, Israel will not be able to take part in its implementation." Reuters, "Israel rejects call to join anti-nuclear treaty" May 29, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/05/29/us-israel-nuclear-treaty-idUSTRE64S1ZN20100529>

² <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/26/us-nuclear-mideast-iran-idUSBRE8AP0KY20121126> Reuters, Nov 26, 2012

³ <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Jlem-rejects-UN-call-to-open-nuke-program-to-probe>

Although the conceptual framework of the proposed plan for NWFZ in the Middle East remains valid, there are some geopolitical changes that need to be taken into consideration for the WMD-free zone. In the early 1970s, when the original plan took shape, a bipolar system prevailed in the international system. During that time, major strategic issues like nuclear weapons were under the strict control of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Their spheres of influence were also defined according to the geopolitical map of those days. However, after more than two decades since the end of the Cold War, there are still some ambiguities about the finite shape of the geopolitical landscape of the region. The question of where to draw the region's borders on the new geopolitical map became more acute after the events of September 11, 2001, and following the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan that later stretched to Pakistan. In the aftermath of those events, it was even suggested that Afghanistan and Pakistan have to be included in map of the "New Middle East".⁴

In the original proposed plan for the NWFZ in the Middle East, nuclear weapons were the only category of weapons of mass destruction that were targeted for elimination, while in the new plan for the WMD-free zone, chemical and biological weapons and their delivery systems are included in the free zone. Naturally, with this extension of scope, the process becomes more complicated and challenging. Apparently, the motive of Egypt and some other Arab countries at that time were to reach a compromise deal with Israel in the Middle East peace process. In that context, the Arab initiative was considered as part of a bargain and concession to Israel, who sought a linkage between its nuclear arsenal and the chemical weapons in Egypt and Syria. Ultimately this appeared to have the goal of evading pressures regarding its nuclear weapons. However, the inclusion of chemical and biological weapons in the proposed zone complicates an already difficult issue. It is better to prioritize goals and place nuclear weapons first, since there already exist two important international instruments—the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention—that cover those two categories of weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, the inclusion of delivery vehicles of weapons of mass destruction in the agenda of the zone might cause some hindrance in reaching a consensus, since these systems are diversified and include many varieties of weaponry, ranging from simple hand-held delivery systems to the most sophisticated types like the warplanes or submarines.

Israel's Nuclear Policy

As a non-NPT member possessing some 60 to 400 nuclear weapons,⁵ Israel has consistently taken the position that a comprehensive peace in the Middle East must precede any prohibition of nuclear weapons. To avert any blame for its nuclear policies, Israel has adopted a policy of ambiguity regarding its nuclear arsenal, which it obtained with the complicity of the West.⁶ However, Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity is a farce, since the international community is well aware of the existence of its nuclear arsenal and its ability to deliver them by aircraft, ballistic missile, and submarine-launched cruise missiles against any country in the Middle East.

Ironically, nuclear weapons have not provided greater security for Israel in the past and they are not

⁴ The term "New Middle East", was first coined by former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2006.

⁵ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East. In the Shadow of Iran*, London, 2008, p. 132.

⁶ Seymour Hersh, *The Samson Option* (Random House, 1991)

likely to do so in the future. While Israel has the most cordial relations with the United States, its insistence on having an independent nuclear force is questionable and could only be interpreted as a sign of arrogance, since it is common knowledge that it could not withstand any serious military confrontation without US help or intervention. The notion of having nuclear weapons to confront the overwhelming Arab forces is irrelevant too, because in all wars with the Arab countries in the past, Israel's nuclear weapons had no role to play. Furthermore, if the reasoning of those who argue that nuclear weapons are effective as deterrence against a nuclear threat is accepted, Israel can easily rely on its closest ally and seek protection under the US nuclear umbrella, as countries such as Japan and South Korea do.

Presently, Israel's nuclear policy is not only a major obstacle to the establishment of a NWFZ in the region but potentially can ignite a new war in the region. To maintain what it considers as its right to nuclear monopoly, Israel, with US backing, has been involved in a dirty covert war against Iran. It has targeted Iran's nuclear program that is entirely under supervision and safeguards of the IAEA. Thus, Israel's attempts to portray Iran as an existential threat can only be interpreted as a policy to avert international pressures regarding its systematic infringement of the rights of the Palestinians, as well as to divert attention from its nuclear arsenal.

Iran's Nuclear Policy

As a founding member of the NPT and the first promoter of a NWFZ in the Middle East in 1974, Iran has been a faithful member of the NPT. Iran has consistently denied any ambition to acquire nuclear weapons,⁷ but has insisted on "its inalienable right to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination" under Article IV of the NPT. Iran has declared that its current enrichment is at the level of 3.5% and some 20% for medical research and pharmaceutical isotopes – this is far less than the 95% required for nuclear weapons. Furthermore, with Israel practically under the US nuclear umbrella, the chances that Iran would attack Israel are zero.

Witnessing the mounting pressure against Iran's peaceful nuclear program, while at the same time noticing that Israel, as a non-NPT party, enjoys a blank cheque to acquire and to increase the stockpiles of its nuclear weapons, leaves many experts puzzled as to why Iran would not exercise its option to withdraw from the NPT. Obviously, Iran and other states in the region have legal grounds under Article X of the Treaty for withdrawal from the NPT if they chose to do so, because, since the time they signed the NPT, Israel has acquired a large nuclear arsenal that are now targeted against them.⁸

⁷ Despite hysteria created by some media outlets, Iran has been cautious to avoid any action that would lead to production of nuclear weapons. Hans Blix former Director General of the IAEA (1981 to 1997) is quoted as saying: "So far Iran has not violated NPT and there is no evidence right now that suggests that Iran is producing nuclear weapons." See: <http://antiwar.com/blog/2013/03/06/un-official-hans-blix-iran-nuke-threat-is-overhyped/>

⁸ Article X of the NPT stipulates that: "Each Party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty, have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country. It shall give notice of such withdrawal to all other Parties to the Treaty and to the United Nations Security Council three months in advance. Such notice shall include a statement of the extraordinary events it regards as having jeopardized its supreme interests."

Nuclear Disarmament

The first necessary step toward the establishment of a WMD-free zone is obviously elimination of existing weapons in the region. In what can be interpreted as a policy to appease Israel, most Western countries and their research institutions fail to address this critical issue, namely Israel's nuclear weapons. Of course, the existing nuclear weapons in Turkey, as part of NATO's nuclear sharing policy, are another contentious issue that needs to be addressed in its own place. A legitimate question frequently posed by the NPT's non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) relates to the commitments of the NPT's recognized nuclear weapons states (NWS) to comprehensive nuclear disarmament and their respect for the rights of NNWS to live peacefully without being threatened by nuclear weapons. In other words, are NWS willing to give NNWS the much advocated negative security assurances? Furthermore, any disarmament effort, including a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, could not be achieved in a vacuum and needs to be consistent with the general efforts toward comprehensive nuclear disarmament.

It is sad and disappointing to see that, while 23 years have elapsed since the end of the Cold War, the same rhetorics regarding nuclear weapons are prevalent. What is more puzzling for the people in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world is why NWS do not practice what they preach, or, why there is no serious thinking and planning for a Europe without weapons of mass destruction. If the NWS continue to drag their feet over the realization of comprehensive nuclear disarmament, as they have done during past decades, and worse still, if they insist on modernizing and using these weapons to threaten other nations, there is little or no hope for a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. Similarly, while there are Israeli nuclear weapons in the region and Israel refuses to join the NPT or to commit itself to nuclear disarmament, it is hard to imagine any breakthrough in the negotiations for a WMD-free zone.

Conclusion

With the geopolitical changes sweeping throughout the Middle East and North Africa, major shifts in policies and approaches are not unexpected. Presently, the vivid case is Egypt, which is the most influential player in the Arab world. Signs of an early change came in the 2010 NPT Review Conference, when Egypt took a leading role among other Arab countries to pressure the United States to accept the language in the resolution regarding Israel.⁹ But a much tougher stance by Egypt was evident when, in a protest over the failure of the international community to implement a resolution for a Middle East free of nuclear weapons, it walked out of the April 2013 meeting of the NPT preparatory committee for the 2015 Review Conference. Turkey also strives to have a greater role in the new Middle East and it is widely believed that it aspires to be a model for Arab countries that are experiencing revolutionary changes in the context of the Arab Awakening. However, Turkey is ambivalent and has yet to decide about the US nuclear weapons stationed on its territory, which would certainly hinder it becoming an active partner in the WMD-free zone project.

After many failed efforts during the past decades to establish a NWFZ in the Middle East, the

⁹ The phrase in the resolution is: "The Conference recalls the reaffirmation by the 2000 Review Conference of the importance of Israel's accession to the Treaty and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards."

Helsinki Conference now symbolizes the commitment of nuclear power states to the NPT. Thus, Iran and the Arab states in the region are earnestly looking forward to the HC.¹⁰ Furthermore, Tehran considers that a successful meeting on the WMD-free zone would provide a chance to eliminate all ambiguities raised by the Western powers regarding Iran's nuclear program. At present, the project is also a policy priority for Iran since it is currently the chair of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The NAM, with 120 member countries, has in the past rendered its support for the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. Indeed, the wide support that WMD-free zone enjoys in the international community encourages the early convening of the HC.

¹⁰ President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in his speech at the UN Conference on the revision of the NPT in 2010, once again emphasized on the importance of nuclear free zone in the Middle East. See: http://english.irib.ir/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=60482:text-of-president-ahmadinejads-address-to-the-un-npt-review-conference&Itemid=182

Where Do We Go From Here? A New Israeli Approach to Tension-Reduction in the Middle East

*Emily B. Landau and Shimon Stein**

This article recaps Israel’s position on the idea of holding a WMD-free zone conference and sets forth, in broad strokes, the rationale and essence of an approach that we believe would address not only Israel’s concerns, but has the potential of advancing stability and security for the region as a whole: establishing a Regional Security Dialogue Forum in the Middle East.

Israel’s Position on the WMD-Free Zone Idea

We can succinctly summarize Israel’s position on the WMD-free zone conference idea from four perspectives: procedure, arms control “ideology”, culture, and current political realities. In purely procedural terms, Israel found it quite difficult to support the WMD-free zone idea given the fact that, as a non-member of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), it was not party to the defining resolutions that were adopted under the NPT umbrella. Not only was Israel not present at these discussions, but the way in which the issues have been framed by successive NPT review conferences would not allow the space for Israel to lay out its critical security concerns. Clearly, in any arms control and disarmament discussion, all understandings and agreements must be reached by consensus.

From the perspective of arms control “ideology”, Israel and Egypt have presented diametrically opposed approaches – these approaches have accompanied regional discourse on this issue since the Arms Control and Regional Security talks of the early 1990s (part of the multilateral track of the Madrid Peace Process). Israel strongly advocates an incremental approach that views arms control as a long process of confidence building and gradual political transformation, leading eventually to successful negotiations and the establishment of a WMD-free zone. By contrast and in line with its preferred focus on the weapons per se, the Egyptian position views Israel joining the NPT as the first confidence building measure to be taken.

Cultural issues also cast a long shadow over the likely success of a conference: Israel is highly concerned about the ingrained institutional culture of deceit that has been revealed in a number of Middle East states over the past 25 years. This refers to a disturbing tendency to violate commitments to WMD non-proliferation and/or disarmament. This was evident in Saddam

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Hussein's Iraq, Qaddafi's Libya, Syria, and Iran.¹ States that joined the NPT and then proceeded to work on a secret military nuclear program have rendered the starting point for regional discussion of these strategic capabilities—a discussion which critically hinges on mutual confidence and trust—extremely poor. The situation is no better in respect to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention, which are not universally accepted in the Middle East. Indeed, several states have actually used chemical weapons in the past, with the most recent case being Syria.²

Finally, from a political perspective, the current Arab awakening and the transformation in the region has created opportunities that Israel would be well advised to explore. The paradigm shift that we are currently witnessing in the region changes the working assumptions that determine inter-state relations. This could be an auspicious time to carve out a new approach to arms control in the Middle East. The Southeast Asian model could have relevance in this regard: a suitable regional forum to promote discussion of regional security should be inclusive in terms of membership and comprehensive in terms of agenda, in order to deal properly with all asymmetries.

The Rationale for a New Approach

The overt goal of a Middle East WMD-free zone is to eliminate WMD, but also at stake in the current debate over this idea are conceptions of regional stability and security. Indeed, the overriding factor that is precluding movement toward a WMD-free zone is the very different views among the various regional states on the sources of security threats and regional tension in the Middle East. When regional security dialogue is reduced to an exclusive focus on negotiating a WMD-free zone, this encourages a tendency to place sole emphasis on the destabilizing effect of *weapons* as such, which also enables Arab states to highlight the current advantage that Israel maintains in this regard. For Israel, however, security is primarily a function of its highly problematic relations with its neighbors; while there is no shortage of tensions and conflicts that cut across the Middle East, Israel is the only state that is subject to ongoing rhetoric that negates and denies its very right to exist as a sovereign state. This creates a severe security asymmetry in the region that works to Israel's detriment, and has, for over 40 years, fueled Israel's perceived need to maintain a strategic deterrent capability as insurance against existential attack.

One could conclude that this constitutes an irresolvable zero-sum situation: one side is focused on the weapons and the other on inter-state relations. But the fact is that while Egyptian-led insistence on singling out Israel and targeting it in the nuclear realm precludes any chance of moving forward on the WMD-free zone idea, collectively working on security relations in the Middle East would have clear benefits for *all* regional parties. Moreover, if the regional atmosphere did improve, this could create the basis for beginning to move forward on a more ambitious arms control agenda.

¹ See the speech of Shaul Chorev, Head of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, to the 56th IAEA General Conference in September 2012: <http://iaec.gov.il/About/SpeakerPosts/Documents/IAEA%20statement%20Sep2012.pdf> (accessed 25 May 2013).

² For information on past use by Egypt, Iran, Iraq and Libya see chronology compiled by James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) at: <http://cns.miis.edu/wmdme/chrono.htm>. On Syria, see for example: Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Michael R. Gordon, "Saying Syria Used Sarin Gas, Kerry Makes Case for Attack," *The New York Times*, September 1, 2013.

Rather than trying to force onto the regional agenda an idea (the WMD-free zone) that is not working—thereby creating false expectations that can only engender further disappointment and frustration—we propose to instead work seriously on an idea that not only would make sense for the region, but could more easily be tailored as a win-win proposition. Setting up a forum for regional security dialogue in the Middle East draws on the same underlying rationale as the WMD-free zone idea—namely the need to reduce regional tensions and lower the chance of escalation that could lead to mass destruction—but equally addresses the problematic conditions the region faces in this regard: inter-state tensions and conflicts, and the debilitating lack of trust that has been engendered by years of states systematically cheating on their international disarmament commitments.

Indeed, the Regional Security Dialogue Forum idea goes much further. The Middle East stands out in its stark lack of an inclusive regional institution where security issues can be discussed. The region sorely needs a forum for regional interaction. The discussion should focus on a comprehensive agenda, determined by the regional parties, and the NPT-sanctioned, one-dimensional WMD-free zone idea does not offer a solution. As noted, the WMD-free zone has one objective: to eliminate a category of weapons. The objective of the forum would be much broader, and it could ultimately serve as the venue for discussing a WMD-free zone, emanating from a regional process.

The idea would be to advance this idea in its own right, and on its own merits. If regional states are truly serious about reducing tensions and threats in the region, it is difficult to envision substantive—rather than political—grounds for objecting to setting up a forum for regional security dialogue. As noted, we envision two guiding principles for this forum: inclusiveness with respect to invitation to participate, and comprehensiveness with respect to the topics on the agenda.

Regional Security Dialogue Forum: What Would it Entail?

Initiative, framework, and structure

The initiative for setting up such a forum—which is meant to improve relations among regional states—should logically emanate from the region. However, given the state of current relations among regional states, extra regional support will be essential for setting up the forum. This should not be understood in the sense that the idea would be imposed from the outside; rather, we envision something along the lines of the Madrid multilateral track of the early 1990s: the United States took the initiative, consulted regional parties, and raised the stakes for not attending. This of course necessitates the presence of a strong party (or parties) that accords this goal high enough priority to take on this challenging role.

The forum's agenda (topics to be discussed) should be agreed upon before the first meeting, but another possibility would be to use initial meetings as a venue for discussing the agenda, structure, and format. We propose to begin discussions on agreed topics, even if not all of the essential parties are present. Any positive outcome of such a forum could serve as a benchmark for others to join in. Still, there will be a need to identify a group of states whose presence is central to the discussion, although no state should be able to prevent the forum from convening and meeting.

In envisioning such a forum, states can draw encouragement from the numerous Track II discussions that have been ongoing in various formats and locations (mainly outside the region,

but also within) since the early 1990s, with participants coming from many states, including those that we might imagine would be hesitant to send official representation. Some Track 1.5 meetings have even included officials from antagonistic states. Moving such discussions to the official level should not pose an insurmountable obstacle. Although official participation would be necessary, media coverage is certainly not, and it would be best to keep discussions out of the limelight. An additional point regarding the format of dialogue is not to insist on agreements as the final outcome of every discussion; rather, the parties should engage in drafting guiding principles for the process and for relations among participants. In looking for relevant regional models, the Asian Regional Forum could be a source of inspiration. This model is relevant because it provides an example in which unresolved political conflicts were not a precondition for establishing a framework to address security issues of mutual concern, or to agree on confidence building measures.

Substance

The agenda of such a forum should be comprehensive, with security broadly defined so as to include issues that have the potential to cause instability if not addressed regionally. The discussion should include both soft security as well as the classic hard security concerns, including the issue of WMD. Such an agenda will entail adjusting attitudes in Israel, since until now Israel has only agreed to discuss very soft confidence and security building measures and/or conventional weapons, and has only been willing to discuss WMD at a final stage. It is important to emphasize, however, that comprehensive dialogue of all security concerns—including those related to WMD—would take place in a framework that is explicitly defined as regional security dialogue.

Policy Recommendation to Israel: Place a Proposal on the Table

The conference on a WMD-free zone for the Middle East that was slated to take place in Helsinki during 2012 was called off in late November, with no new date having been set. Polar positions among potential regional participants regarding the mandate, content, and agenda of such talks, exacerbated by political upheavals in some Arab states, made it impossible to push the initiative forward at this time.

There can be no doubt that a regional security dialogue, with the prospect of positive outcomes in the form of agreements that encourage regional cooperation and reduction of regional tensions, is in Israel's interest. Our recommendation to Israel is to draft a proposal—fleshing out the ideas included in this article—which it could set before the conveners of the postponed WMD-free zone conference. This could serve as the basis for the reappointment—by the conveners or whichever entity assumes the lead on setting up the proposed forum—of the Finnish facilitator, Ambassador Jaakko Laajava, with a mandate for facilitating the setting up of a Regional Security Dialogue Forum, and a letter of invitation to all regional states to partake in this endeavor. Keeping Laajava in the role of facilitator in his personal capacity – not as a function of the NPT frame – makes sense because of the vast experience that he has accumulated over the past two years with all regional parties in his attempts to convene the now-defunct conference, and the measure of trust that he has inspired across the region.

Ridding the Middle East of Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Jordanian Perspective on Untapped Options

Ayman Khalil

This paper considers the two opposing preconditions for establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, namely “peace first” or “security first” It discusses key obstacles facing the zone and explores a number of options that could creatively address central impasses. The paper ends with a discussion of the Amman Framework, an initiative created to support the process of implementing the WMD-free zone proposal.

Background

The creation of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East has proven to be a very complicated concept. Despite the declared willingness of all members in the region, including Israel and Iran, to establish a zone free from nuclear weapons and other WMD, the Middle East is far from achieving this objective and the zone remains unattainable thus far.

Historically, it was Iran in 1974, supported by Egypt, which first called for the creation of a nuclear weapon-free zone (NWFZ). The decision was reaffirmed in 1990 by former Egyptian President Mubarak who called for establishing a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, namely chemical and biological weapons. Ever since 1980, the UN General Assembly regularly adopted resolutions stressing the importance of creating a NWFZ in the Middle East. However, one of the most significant developments came in the early 1990s when the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) process was launched as part of the Madrid peace conference. A specialized multilateral dialogue process began to discuss the future and the features of a regional security regime, including the prospect for creating a WMD-free zone. ACRS was the first multilateral process of its kind in the region, publicly bringing together Arabs and Israelis face to face to discuss security arrangements.

Participants in these discussions identified two opposing views on arms control and regional security. The first was the “peace first” approach, stressing that security arrangements could be best determined “if and when” peace and normalization prevailed. The second was the “security first” approach, stressing that peace could only be achieved via security arrangements which would include defining the features of a WMD-free zone. The clashing perspectives ultimately led to the collapse of ACRS discussions.³ Optimism surrounding the launch of ACRS process faded and by 1995 the process was widely considered to have collapsed, a failure that coincided with the negotiation of the resolution on the Middle East at the 1995 NPT review and extension conference, which some participants hailed as a remarkable accomplishment, while others considered it a radical concession and failure of Arab diplomacy.

³ See Michael Yaffe, “An Overview of the Middle East Peace Process Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security”, *Confidence-Building and Security Co-operation in the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East*, (Malta: University of Malta 1994); and Peter Jones, “Arms Control in the Middle East: Is It Time to Renew ACRS?” *Disarmament Forum*, no. 2 (1995), available at www.unidir.org/bdd/fiche-article.php?ref_article=2278

Arab intellectuals have consistently questioned the validity of the “peace first” approach. Israel enjoys two peace treaties, with Egypt and Jordan, as well as a number of bilateral understandings with other countries in the region. Yet these agreements have not contributed to building confidence, nor resulted in any tangible results for creating a WMD-free zone. Experts have also debated the “security first” approach. People were aware that resuming security talks may result in discussions taking place indefinitely and to roadmaps resulting in non-tangible outcomes.

Obstacles Facing the Zone

Among the numerous challenges facing the creation of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, three issues are worth considering: the impracticality of nuclear deterrence in the Middle East, geographical boundaries of the proposed zone, and the scope of prohibition.

First, it should be noted that deterrence has been the driving force and key motivation behind the development and acquisition of nuclear capabilities in the region. However, this position is neither realistic nor logical. Unlike the Indian subcontinent, where nuclear weapons are designed to maintain bilateral deterrence between India and Pakistan, the Middle East is in a unique situation where Israel’s nuclear capabilities have been acquired to maintain unilateral deterrence and nuclear superiority. The evidence supporting the Israeli argument of achieving deterrence through the possession of unconventional capabilities has not been convincing.¹ Historical events indicate that Israel’s capabilities failed to deter attacks in 1973 (Sinai war), in 1990 (Iraqi strikes on Israel), and in 1996 (the Lebanon war and Hezbollah missile retaliation). Furthermore, the notion of deterrence in this geographically defined area seems quite unrealistic, the credibility of nuclear deterrence against modest conventional capabilities in the region seems highly questionable.

Second, regarding the boundaries of a zone, according to the IAEA and a related 1990 UN study group, the Middle East is considered to include the member states of the League of Arab States along with Iran and Israel, but excluding Turkey. Throughout the ACRS process there were views that these perimeters should be expanded to include other states. For example, during the ACRS Track-II discussions there were calls to consider the inclusion of Pakistan and some former republics of the Soviet Union to become part of the zone. Attempts at expanding the region provide a clear illustration that the Middle East is no longer defined on geographical or strategic merits, but rather on an ideological basis.

A third issue is the scope of prohibition of the zone. Attention has traditionally focused on the NWFZ idea, as this was seen as a step towards achieving a WMD-free zone. However, establishing a NWFZ as a precursor was not seen as a practical approach since it lacked comprehensiveness and meant singling out some countries. Moving from partial to comprehensive prohibition, from the general to the specific, has added to the complexity of achieving the zone, but was needed to maintain a balanced approach, taking into consideration all states in the region. Recently, the Final Document of the 2010 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) created a precedent whereby delivery systems were directly linked and attached to the scope of the free zone. This, of course, is yet another complicating factor. The 2010 RevCon called for a conference, to be held in 2012, to discuss these issues and others related to establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. The organizers planned to hold the conference in Helsinki

¹ Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein “Deterrence: The elusive dependent variable” *World Politics* 42, no. 3 (1990): 336-69

but cancelled the meeting at the minute. Efforts to hold a conference in Helsinki are continuing.

Untapped Options

The Helsinki conference is in great need of “non-conventional” proposals, creative reasoning and out-of-the-box thinking. Take, for example, the debate about the necessity of all states to join treaties prohibiting WMD and the need for Israel to become a member of the NPT before creating the zone. On the one hand, an argument is made that the commitment of all zone members to the NPT is a legal precondition for the creation of the zone. Thus, Israel’s failure to accede to the Treaty represents a barrier in the quest of creating the zone and weakens its chances. On the other hand, the same principle would entail the commitment of all regional states to all relevant arms control treaties that treat other weapons of mass destruction (chemical and biological) as well as their delivery systems. Careful consideration of international models and treaties reveals that this is a condition that is neither mandatory nor necessary. Hence, NPT membership or accession to other relevant arms control treaties should not be a precondition for countries wishing to establish or join the zone.

Should peace and normalization come first or should we start with the zone? Between the “peace first” and the “security first” approaches, there exists a third option, namely, dealing with a WMD-free zone as a stand-alone concept. By doing so, there is no need to link the zone issue to security agreements or to the fate of a peace process. The creation of a NWFZ in Latin America provides a very useful example that the prohibition of nuclear weapons may be used as an effective tool preceding the resolution of conflicts and as an incentive to settling pending territorial disputes. With the absence of a dynamic peace process and with a lingering Arab-Israeli conflict, confidence and security building measures are needed.

A number of intermediate measures could be introduced on the bilateral or multilateral level. Practical steps include the development of regional cooperation schemes that consider conducting joint inspection visits to nuclear sites; the introduction of non-intrusive monitoring activities and information sharing; cooperation on strengthening nuclear and radiological security measures as well as in developing peaceful uses of nuclear energy; and the promotion of ideas similar to “Security without Nuclear Weapons” or “Non-Offensive Defense,” which would prove to be beneficial to the Middle Eastern context. The application of confidence-building measures based on technical cooperation would positively affect the regional situation and ease current tensions. Overall, these measures would significantly lower the psychological barriers and help resolve outstanding issues.

The Amman Framework

An important mechanism dedicated to supporting the Helsinki process and its facilitator is the Amman Framework, which was established by the Arab Institute of Security Studies and sponsored by the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs. One of its first achievements was the creation of an independent international commission that aims to support the outcomes of the 2010 NPT RevCon, including the key decision to hold a conference on the Middle East WMD-free zone. An essential objective is the provision of full backing and assistance to Finnish Ambassador Jaakko Laajava, the appointed facilitator of the conference, before, during, and following the meeting in Helsinki.

To invigorate the process, the Amman Framework has initiated the “State of the Resolution,” a mechanism for reviewing and monitoring the status of the 1995 NPT Review Conference resolution on the Middle East and the subsequent outcomes of the 2010 NPT RevCon. The “State of the Resolution” engages regional parties, UN representatives, co-sponsors of the 1995 NPT Middle East resolution, as well as civil society representatives. Progress toward a WMD-free zone is a collective process. It benefits from positive contributions and inputs from all stakeholders, including non-governmental and academic sectors. The Amman Framework members share the deep belief that a bottom-up approach is needed to trigger greater progress towards establishing the zone. In this regard, governments should be encouraged to rely not only on their own expertise and capacities, but also to seek and consider contributions and ideas from civil society, academia, and non-governmental organizations. The primary intention should be aiming for a coordinated and complementary approach toward achieving the mutual goal, rather than replicating or competing with one another.

Recent political turmoil in the Middle East must not alter or delay the course of action. Political changes experienced within regional political structures are likely to raise expectations that newly emerging leaderships make progress on this issue. The Amman Framework underlines that the Helsinki conference is not intended to target a specific country, nor to create political embarrassment. The goals outlined in the 2010 NPT Review Conference are undeniably in the mutual and common interest of all parties concerned. The Helsinki process is a platform that should be properly invested in – it is an opportunity for facilitating constructive dialogue among states of the region. Detaching or distancing from this process will have negative implications for all.

A Lebanese Perspective on the Proposal of a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East

Mahmoud Nasreddine

Lebanon supports the Middle East WMD-free zone proposal in the context of what it sees as regional priorities. This paper reviews Lebanon's position on the WMD-free zone, examines some of the dynamics of non-proliferation practice within the region, and discusses useful non-proliferation precedents, which can aid this paper's central recommendation: a regional WMD inspection and verification regime.

Lebanon and the WMD-Free Zone Proposal

All the major events and wars in the Middle East have had their impact on Lebanon. Lebanon supported the 2002 Arab Peace Process proposal between the Arab countries and Israel and showed a clear interest in all projects and proposals aiming to decrease tensions in the Middle East without endangering the rights of the Palestinian people.

Lebanon believes that the nuclear warheads developed and built by Israel are a permanent danger to peace in the Middle East and the world. The most important facilities (like the Dimona reactor and spent fuel depository) are not under the IAEA safeguards system: this fact is of great concern in Lebanon and other neighboring countries. These facilities are not only suspected to host military activities but they are also the source of serious safety and security concerns. Because of the short distance between Dimona and Lebanon (and some other Arab countries), any nuclear accident will have very dangerous consequences in these countries.

Since 1974, Lebanon has contributed to or supported all efforts in the United Nations and during the IAEA general conferences and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conferences that aimed to establish a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. The most important events in the process to establish such a zone are the 1995 NPT review conference resolution on the Middle East and the 2010 NPT review conference resolution, which adopted five practical steps towards the establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. These steps included the appointment of a WMD-free zone facilitator and holding a regional conference to discuss the issue in 2012.

The League of Arab States secretariat considered the 1995 review conference resolution as an important event and created a dedicated committee, representing the 22 Arab member states, to prepare documents to be presented in the future to any international or regional conference aiming to implement the 1995 resolution. Lebanon participated in these meetings and contributed actively to the development of a draft Middle East WMD-free zone treaty, with protocols concerning the three weapons categories (nuclear, chemical, and biological), and the inspection and verification operations.

Unfortunately, this draft has never been finalized or adopted by the council of Arab Foreign Affairs ministers. The years have shown little progress in the implementation of the 1995 resolution because of the negative attitude of Israel toward the establishment of such a zone and the support

of the Israeli position by the United States and most Western countries. The Israeli position is based on the priority of peace between the different Middle Eastern countries before discussing the WMD-free zone, whereas the Arabs consider the nuclear arms of Israel the greatest obstacle to peace.¹ The peace process will take a long time because of the Israeli refusal of the 2002 proposal by the Arab Summit (which met in Beirut) and the Israeli position concerning the rights of the Palestinian people and the Arab occupied territories.

Regional Dynamics of Non-Proliferation

A process of confidence-building is needed, but while this necessity has been evoked on many occasions, there is no movement on the ground. All the proposals on this matter are based on the possibility of civil or scientific cooperation between Israel and the Arab countries as a step toward confidence-building. Yet cooperation in agriculture or in water management, for example, will not help to solve the problem of the Palestinian territories or to build confidence in the nuclear field, where the Arabs are convinced that Israel has a military nuclear program. We have to face the problem as it is and go directly to the nuclear, chemical, and biological activities in all the Middle Eastern countries, including Iran, Syria, and Israel. Full transparency in these fields is therefore a key element toward building the necessary confidence between the parties.

Transparency in all the safety and non-proliferation issues may be a first step in the confidence-building process between the concerned parties. The situation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region shows some difference in the behavior of states toward these safety and non-proliferation issues:

- The Arab States are today fully transparent with respect to the IAEA inspectors.² The IAEA is able to confirm that there is no uranium enrichment or spent fuel reprocessing activity in the Arab countries.
- Iran's nuclear program is in need of greater transparency to the IAEA and the international community, particularly concerning suspicions of a military component. Iran is party to the NPT and has signed a comprehensive safeguard agreement with the IAEA. The discussion with the P5+1 is about the enrichment program and the inspection by the IAEA of some sites or facilities which are not declared as nuclear facilities.
- Israel is not a party to the NPT. Some nuclear facilities, like the Dimona site, are not under IAEA safeguards. This situation generates concerns about safety and non-proliferation threats. Many experts report that Israel has already built more than 200 nuclear warheads.

¹ Some states (Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine) signed peace agreements with Israel while the other Arab states did not sign such an agreement and do not have any diplomatic relationship with Israel.

² The IAEA has requested and been denied further inspection of sites in Syria. The Qaddafi regime's nuclear program did not include serious military components that were beyond the design phase. The IAEA inspectors found very little equipment readied for activity to launch the program – the equipment was still in boxes. Many experts believe that the foreign Intelligence services were in possession of this information significantly before the regime declaration about “the nuclear program of Libya”; see <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/30/world/libya-s-atom-bid-in-early-phases.html> (accessed 25 May 2013). Iraq's military nuclear program was dismantled in the 1990s under international auspices.

Thus transparency in the practices of states of the MENA region is inconsistent. A genuine confidence-building process in the region is not possible without efforts from all the states, including Iran and Israel. Inspection of all nuclear facilities (including any suspicious sites), as well as full cooperation with the IAEA, are essential elements in the transparency process.

The persistence of what is perceived as double standards and the will of some powers to deal with each country on a case-by-case basis does not help to generate greater transparency or to build additional confidence between, on the one hand, states of the region, and, on the other hand, between some states of the region and the international community. Since the NPT Review Conference in 1995 and the resolution aiming to organize an international conference dedicated to establish a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, the many visits of the IAEA Director General to the states of the region have not succeeded in building confidence between these states. Even the many workshops convened on these objectives have failed to reach any progress.

The Helsinki Conference and Global Non-Proliferation Efforts

I believe that all concerned parties have to review their security paradigms and to look to the safety concerns and the proliferation threats as a whole in the region: the Arab states must stop focusing solely on the Israeli nuclear warheads; Israel must understand the Arab concerns about its nuclear program; Iran must accept that its neighbors have legitimate concerns about clearing up the “possible military dimensions” of its nuclear program; and the P5+1 group must also stop focusing only on the Iranian nuclear program. The conference to be held in Finland (at a date to be decided, after the original plan of December 2012 was postponed by the United States) to discuss the implementation of the 1995 Review Conference resolution on the establishment of a Middle East WMD-free zone is a crucial opportunity to look to the region as a whole and to discuss both the Iranian and the Israeli nuclear programs.

Iran continues to support the idea of establishment of a Middle East WMD-free zone. The outputs of the conference (once it takes place) will affect internal discussions in Iran about its nuclear program and its relationships with the IAEA and the P5+1 group. Iran will not have any good reason to stay out of the conference. No one inside Iran is able to take the responsibility to stop the nuclear program, as it has now become a part of the regime ideology. At the same time, no one outside Iran is able to stop this nuclear program either. The conference will hopefully be an opportunity to thaw the tense situation and to start new discussions based on a new project: a Middle East WMD-free zone where all the states of the region, including Iran and Israel, will work together to destroy their own WMD and to stop any projects to develop new ones.

The attitude of the Helsinki Conference facilitator is important. The agenda must be clear and simple. It must express the will to discuss the establishment of the zone and avoid spending time on other preliminary topics. Israel was always against the establishment of a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East but we have to agree that the only peaceful way to stop the Iranian program is to stop the Israeli program too (and any other programs in the region if there are any). The United States is a keen supporter of Israel on this kind of topic. Washington can play a positive role before and after the conference, to make the idea of such a zone possible, and, furthermore, the United States should give guarantees to all the parties and push them toward a consensus.

Past U.S. efforts to help control WMD development in the Middle East, insofar as they have been

seen as alternatives to the WMD-free zone proposal, have not been especially effective. For example the Bush administration established the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) in May 2003 with the goal of fostering a greater worldwide capacity to stop the illicit movement of materials that can be used to produce biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons. At present, 102 nations have signed on to the effort (Lebanon, Syria and Egypt are not participating to this initiative – they are not against its purposes but, rather, the issue is with the lack of any serious international effort to oblige Israel to sign the NPT.) Participating PSI states pledge to exchange information about suspected illicit WMD material transfers and to take action to interdict unconventional weapons and related materials as they move through their territory or international waters. It is not clear to what extent the program has been successful: many countries like Iran, North Korea, and Israel continue to advance their missile and nuclear capabilities. A 2012 report from Congress' Government Accountability Office faulted the Pentagon and the State Department for not properly evaluating the degree to which the program was meeting its aims.³

Recommendation—A Regional Inspection and Verification Agency

The experiences of European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM), established after the Second World War, and of the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC), established in 1991, may be very useful precedents for the Middle East. EURATOM is an agency which promotes the peaceful use of nuclear energy and controls the export of nuclear and dual uses materials and equipment. ABACC is charged with inspecting facilities in both Brazil and Argentina (through a process of mutual inspection) and verifying the peaceful use of nuclear materials in each country.

If the WMD-free zone is difficult to establish in the near future in the Middle East, a paradigm review process could lead to the creation of a regional agency able to inspect all the nuclear, chemical, and biological facilities in the MENA region, including Iran and Israel. Any other cooperation project without transparency is not possible and would be a waste of time. This Agency (The CBRN Middle Eastern Inspection and Verification Agency) will hire inspectors from the regional states in order to undertake each inspection as a mutual inspection.

The proposed Agency can learn from the EURATOM and ABACC experiences, and will ultimately contribute to the implementation of the PSI goals if the Agency member states agree to give it the needed tools for inspection, verification, and for fighting illicit trafficking. The success of the Agency's inspection and verification mission may open new opportunities to establish peaceful cooperation projects between the countries of the region in a wide range of scientific and technical areas including nuclear, biological, and chemical applications.

³ "U.S.-Led WMD Interdiction Program Could do More, GOP Lawmakers Say", Rachel Oswald, Global Security Newswire, 14 March 2013 <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/us-led-wmd-interdiction-program-could-do-more-gop-critics-say/> (accessed 25 May 2013)

The Proposed WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East: A Saudi Perspective

Prince Turki Al Faisal

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has long supported the idea of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. As this paper suggests, there are two key obstacles to progress, namely, the current situation with Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The paper concludes by reflecting on the lack of progress concerning the proposed Helsinki Conference, reiterating the Kingdom's support for such an initiative in line with existing international agreements.

Background to Saudi Support for the Zone Proposal

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supports a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. As a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League, the Kingdom voted for the holding of a conference to discuss the issue at the last review meeting of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) signatories, held in 2010 in New York. At his press conference on 12 February 2013, the Saudi Foreign Minister reiterated the Kingdom's commitment to the Middle East as a zone free of weapons of mass destruction.⁴

As a matter of fact, Saudi Arabia firmly believes that peace in the region and a conclusion to various longstanding conflict-resolution efforts must be primary objectives of the next decade. This peace will only be achieved through cooperation that is built on trust, dialogue and engagement.

Saudi Arabia has concerns about the present situation in the area. First, it is in our interest that Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon, for their doing so would compel other countries in the area to pursue policies that could lead to untold and possibly dramatic consequences. Indeed, the best way toward peace in our region is for all nations—including Iran and Israel—to support the establishment of a WMD-free zone. And this is actually a concept that the Iranian government itself has approved of before. Since the early 1970s Iran joined with Egypt and other nations to work through the United Nations to attempt to gain support for what was called a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. This led, in 1990, to the United Nations issuing a report showing a degree of commonality in the views of the states in the area, including Iran and Israel. In short, all the states expressed a desire for the region to be free of nuclear weapons. This led then Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to propose a resolution calling upon all states in the Middle East to take practical steps towards “the establishment of an effectively verifiable Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction, nuclear, chemical and biological, and their delivery systems.”

And yet, despite all these efforts, our region can hardly be called free of weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, the Middle East is the most militarized region in the world today, largely due to the many conflicts that have raged and still rage in the area. While soldiers, tanks, and planes have been growing in number in the area, the Iraq-Iran War, from 1980–1988 and the second Gulf War of 1991 increased the danger of WMD proliferation—nuclear, biological, and chemical—in the region, as well as ballistic missiles capable of carrying them. The present conflict in Syria poses a grave danger as to the use or misuse of chemical weapons; the confirmation of their use by the

⁴ See http://www.saudiembassy.net/latest_news/news02131301.aspx

Syrian government has been proven.¹ States in the Middle East have sought WMD for various reasons, including deterrence, arms races with neighbors, the ability to attack or project the ability to attack, or to spare the high cost of conventional weapons. The first nation in the region to acquire nuclear capability was Israel, after France, in 1956, agreed to provide them with a 24 mega-watt reactor and a chemical processing plant at Dimona. One can follow this tragic arc right up to current suspicions about Iran's intentions to develop a nuclear weapon capability, as expressed in IAEA reporting.

The Situation with Iran

Iranian leaders' provocative cat and mouse game with the international community over their nuclear intentions raises tensions and increases suspicions of those intentions. Saudi Arabia firmly believes that it is in every nation's interest, including Iran and Israel, that they do not develop a nuclear weapon. This is why, through various initiatives, we are sending messages to Iran that it is their right, as it is any nation's right, and as we ourselves are doing, to develop a civilian nuclear program, but that trying to transform that program into nuclear weapons is a dead end, and that wiser choices will result in wider riches. A zone free of weapons of mass destruction is the best means to get Iran and Israel to give up nuclear weapons.

Such a zone must be accompanied by a rewards regime that provides economic and technical support for countries that join, as well as a nuclear security umbrella guaranteed by the permanent members of the UN Security Council. This should mitigate Israel's professed fears that they use to justify their holding of a nuclear arsenal. It should include a sanctions regime that puts economic and political sanctions on countries that don't join, in addition to military sanctions against those countries that try to develop weapons of mass destruction, also guaranteed by the permanent members of the Security Council. This should prevent any unilateral action by any country to use military means for that purpose. It should also forewarn any country with such ambitions that it will face joint military action if it goes that route.

Barring the current Iranian regime's support for a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, the IAEA report on Iranian nuclear capabilities is disturbing. Iran's dissembling and obfuscation will be overcome when the permanent members of the Security Council declare their willingness to use military means to prevent any country from acquiring any weapon of mass destruction.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Of course, obstacles to establishing the zone are varied beyond WMD capabilities: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a crucial regional factor. As we continue to observe, Israel's unwillingness to cease its unlawful colonization and continual refusal to grant the Palestinians their own homeland is the core reason that this conflict continues. There is no lack of proposals for peace, many of them completely rational and fair. Indeed, the most viable one today remains The Arab Peace Initiative, originally outlined by King Abdullah in 2002. It calls on Israel to withdraw to its 1967 borders and for the establishment of a viable and contiguous Palestine, with its capital in East Jerusalem, and bordering Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. The issue of refugees will be settled through mutual agreement.

¹ See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/13/statement-deputy-national-security-advisor-strategic-communications-ben->

The Kingdom continues to urge Israel to take the necessary steps toward peace and justice. But this issue should be resolved through the discussions and diplomacy to be deployed to establish the WMD-free zone. The Kingdom firmly believes that there will necessarily be negotiations in order to establish the zone and ending the Israeli occupation of Palestine should be on the agenda.

Looking Forward: the Helsinki Conference

The biggest obstacle to progress toward establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East has been the United States' shameful and cavalier way of dealing with the issue. Having supported the NPT Review Conference's decision to hold the conference on the zone, the U.S. nonchalantly announced just two weeks before it was to be held in Helsinki that there was no consensus for holding the conference and scuttled it. One can only hope that President Obama's declared intent to abolish nuclear weapons will prove more genuine and sincere than any tactical political considerations in favor of his client state, Israel. Furthermore, the U.S. position was not in harmony with the other P5 nations; in particular, Russia has voiced its dissatisfaction surrounding the seemingly unilateral announcement. It is therefore imperative that the other four permanent members of the Security Council step forward to repair the damage done by the U.S. to this process and revive efforts to hold the conference as soon as possible.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has cemented its common position with all Arab States regarding the necessity to hold such a conference in order to make progress on the issue. Recent reports of chemical weapons use in the midst of the Syrian conflict only serve to underline the importance of establishing a regional solution encompassing all WMD—and yet this proposal is still sitting on the table. The U.S. was in part responsible for the conference initiative, yet has remained silent over the lack of Israeli engagement with the proposal. There is a real perception amongst Arab States that international commitments are being forsaken.

The international community must recognize that a WMD-free zone is the ideal mechanism to not only create a Middle East free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, but would help end the crisis surrounding the Iranian nuclear program. Iran's disingenuous engagement with the international community is a source of concern. They thus far have only demonstrated a willingness to "talk the talk" on the Zone, yet any new development of nuclear weapons by any country in the region would likely have a domino effect on proliferation. Already Israel insists that Iran's perceived pursuit of nuclear weapons is the single greatest threat to the region and indeed the world. Therefore it must clearly be in Israel's interest, and the responsibility of the U.S. and P5 states, to ensure that the WMD-free zone is the priority for treating this issue.

Yemen's Perspective on the WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East

Ahmed A. Saif

Yemen has the unfortunate status of a failing state and this has implications for WMD proliferation. This paper examines Iranian influence within the internal politics of Yemen to illustrate the complex regional rivalries that are played out within this small state. Yemen's support for the proposed regional WMD-free zone should be understood in the context of its position within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and how the proposal is affected by the fundamental socio-political changes underway throughout the region.

Yemen: A Failing State with Risks of Proliferation?

The 2011 Yemeni uprising was followed by a GCC initiative that drew a road map for an interim period ending in February 2014. Today, the GCC initiative sponsors are trying to find a way out from the stalemate in Yemen in order to avoid the country sliding into chaotic war, which will harm interests internally and, above all, regionally. Strengthening weak states against failure is far easier than reviving them after they have definitively failed or collapsed. Preventing state failure is imperative, yet difficult and costly. However, doing so is profoundly in the interest not only of the inhabitants of the most deprived and ill-governed states of the world, but also of world peace.

State failure is man-made, not merely accidental nor—fundamentally—caused geographically, environmentally, or externally. Leadership decisions and leadership failures have destroyed states and continue to weaken the fragile polities that operate on the edge of failure. It can be easily argued that Yemen has such symptoms. Little legitimacy remains and most importantly, considering that civil conflict is decisive for state failure, the state in Yemen has fallen behind in providing security to its citizens. The Yemeni state has essentially lost control of large swathes of provinces and regions of the country. Citizens have withdrawn to sub-national identities for protection, such as the tribe and sect. This has left the country tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and bitterly contested by warring factions. The military and security establishments are still fragmented and influenced by one or more rivals. Official authorities face insurgencies, varieties of civil unrest, differing degrees of communal discontent, and a plethora of dissent directed at the state and at groups within the state.

Yemen contains weak or flawed institutions; economic opportunities are few and only privilege the few, while corruption flourishes on an unusually destructive scale. The Yemeni elite maximize their personal fortunes, as well as political and economic power. The bureaucracy has long lost its sense of professional responsibility and exists solely to carry out the orders of the executive and, in petty ways, to oppress citizens.

In this context, proliferation of WMD poses a serious problem, as some factions and non-state actors in Yemen may aim to possess such an arsenal. The Huthis in the northern part of Yemen, the separatists in the south, and Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, each could potentially obtain chemical or biological weapons during state and military collapse.

Regional Rivalry: Iran's Geopolitical Role

Ties between Iran and Yemen have been damaged in recent years by the allegations of Iran's support for Huthis (Shi'ite rebels) engaged in armed conflict with Yemeni government forces. Yemeni officials have repeatedly accused Iran of providing funding and weapons to the Huthi rebels and claimed to have discovered Iranian-made arms in rebel weapons caches. Iran has also deployed submarines and warships off Yemen's coast, in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, ostensibly to conduct anti-piracy operations.²

Iran's military presence and support for Huthi rebels has, however, heightened Saudi fears that Iran is attempting to establish a proxy presence similar to Hezbollah on Saudi Arabia's southern border.³ In 2009, Saudi Arabia's air force conducted strikes along its border after Yemeni rebels crossed into its territory and attacked Saudi border forces.⁴ Yemen has closed the Iranian hospital and the other few Iranian investments used as camouflage, as well as claiming to have captured a ship delivering arms and ammunition to the Huthis.⁵

At the same time, American officials have suggested that the Iranian regime is exploiting the internal unrest that engulfed Yemen during the Arab Spring. In March 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told the Senate Appropriations Committee that Iran was "very much involved in the opposition movements in Yemen."⁶ In April of the same year during a speech delivered to troops at Camp Liberty, Baghdad, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates warned that Iran may "try and take advantage" of instability in countries such as Yemen.⁷ Though officials in Iran have denied accusations they are supporting Yemeni militants, Iran has used state media outlets to broadcast Huthi propaganda, characterizing the armed rebels as "anti-government protestors."⁸

² "Leader Calls Iran's Naval Presence in High Seas 'Promising'," IRIB, July 24, 2011, <http://english.irib.ir/radio-islam/news/top-stories/item/79298-leader-calls-irans-naval-presence-in-high-seas-promising> (accessed 25 May 2013)

³ "The New Cold War," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 16, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704116404576262744106483816.html> (accessed 25 May 2013)

⁴ "Saudi Raids Persist, Aiding Yemeni Fight," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125755652567935179.html> (accessed 25 May 2013)

⁵ Ian Black, "Iran and Yemen in tit-for-tat Battle for Street Cred", Friday 27 November 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/nov/27/iran-yemen-street-cred-rename>, (accessed 25 May 2013)

⁶ "Iran contacting Arab opposition movements: Clinton," AFP, 2 March, 2011, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iAPeQ5TXpjKZuPapL-F49WA4gNg?docId=CNG.4103fec93a330f1c195d92e86c2ce8c3b91> (accessed 25 May 2013)

⁷ "Remarks by Secretary Gates During Troop Visit at U.S. Division Center Camp Liberty, Baghdad, Iraq," U.S. Department of Defense, April 7, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4808> (accessed 25 May 2013)

⁸ "Al-Houthi Movement: Yemeni Dictator Seeking to Kill Time," Fars News, April 25, 2011, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9002051059> (accessed 25 May 2013) "Al-Houthi Movement Urges Formation of Transitional Gov't in Yemen," Fars News, June 12, 2011, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9003226080> (accessed 25 May 2013). "Al-Houthi Movement Blasts US, Saudi Arabia's Interference in Yemen," Fars News, July 3, 2011, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9004120606> (accessed 25 May 2013). "Yemen: Another US Battleground?" IRIB, March 1, 2010, <http://english.irib.ir/component/k2/item/59212-yemen-another-us-battleground> (accessed 25 May 2013). "Yemen violence kills one, hurts scores," Press TV, August 7, 2011, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/192725.html> (accessed 25 May 2013). "Yemenis urge regime elements to leave," Press TV, August 5, 2011, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/192411.html> (accessed 25 May 2013).

The transformative events of the Arab Spring have presented Iran with new challenges and opportunities. Most notably, while the regime has been forced to confront the contradictions inherent in its foreign policy, it has nonetheless continued to project its influence using both hard and soft power tactics. Iran's supreme leader has repeatedly claimed that the 1979 Iranian Revolution is the inspiration for the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain and Libya, recently terming these events as "divine blessings". The Iranian government has expressed support for Huthi rebels in Yemen while condemning regime loyalists for their attacks on the opposition.⁹

The Middle East WMD-Free Zone

The proposal to create a WMD-free zone and delivery vehicles in the Middle East has been on the table of the international community for many years now. The idea of a regional solution to nuclear proliferation in the Middle East is not new: in 1974, Iran and Egypt proposed the establishment of a nuclear weapon-free zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East to the UN General Assembly. Each year for the last three decades, the proposal has been unanimously endorsed at the UN General Assembly. In 1990, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak extended the original proposal as to make the region free of all weapons of mass destruction.

Yemen has always supported the concept of a WMD-free zone. The reason is that Yemen never has developed WMD and possession of them is not on the agenda of the Yemeni government. Moreover, on this issue, Yemen is influenced by the stance of GCC states who oppose proliferation of WMD, particularly by Iran. Therefore, if this was the official position of the Yemeni government in stable circumstances, then an extra emphasis will be added on supporting a WMD-free zone in the current chaotic transitional situation Yemen is passing through, with serious fears of state failure.

To break the current impasse in establishing the Middle East WMD-free zone, the motivations of regional states need to be rethought and a framework in which all parties have a net gain in security should be developed. Much can be learned from existing NWFZs, considering that they proved an effective tool for building regional security by adopting non-proliferation norms rather than by reinforcing existing security dilemmas. A similar approach is promising for the Middle East, where nuclear proliferation has not been adequately dealt with by the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and where other categories of weapons have spread. The WMD-free zone in the Middle East is arguably more challenging than previous processes due to the inclusion of WMD and delivery vehicles and to the actual presence of such arsenals in the region.¹⁰

Proliferation of WMD in the Middle East is an imminent threat. Not only are several countries believed to hold nuclear, biological, or chemical armaments and a broad range of delivery vehicles, but disarmament agreements have not been universally accepted in the region. Israel has not signed the NPT, whereas Egypt and Syria remain outside the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention has not been signed by Israel and has yet to be ratified by Egypt and Syria. Furthermore, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty was not signed by

⁹ Will Fulton, "After the Arab Spring: Iran's Foreign Relations in the Middle East", <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/fulton-iran-middle-east-arab-spring-september-28-2011> (accessed 25 May 2013)

¹⁰ Roberta Mulas, "Nuclear Weapon Free Zones and the Nuclear Powers: Lessons for a WMD/DVs Free Zone in the Middle East", *Academic Peace Orchestra Middle East Policy Brief for the Middle East Conference on a WMD/DVS Free Zone*, No. 5, December 2011.

Syria or Saudi Arabia and is awaiting ratification by other regional states. The proposal freeing the Middle East from WMD was discussed in the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Working Group in the context of Arab-Israeli peace process negotiations. The ACRS talks came to a halt when the political context of the peace process changed and because of the unfruitful juxtaposition of “peace first” vs. “disarmament first”. While Israel maintained that regional peace was the precondition for any disarmament initiative, Arab countries claimed that Israeli nuclear disarmament was a precondition for a peace agreement. Despite their failure, the ACRS talks have so far been the only joint regional exercise at arms control in the Middle East that is still lacking common security architecture.

Conclusion

In sum, the current and mosaic transitional phase in key states in the region poses real threats and opportunities. It poses many dangers, including leaking some lethal weapons to the hands of non-state actors. On the other hand, it presents an opportunity to press and persuade these shaky regimes in transition to move forward and sign onto a WMD-free zone. To a great extent, the direction of these states depends on their perception of their own regime security and survival, as well as on incentives provided by the international key players. On top of this, a central challenge remains to convince Israel to step in and join such a process at an early stage.

Key Elements of a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East

Mohamed I. Shaker

This paper examines a number of the key modalities involved in the establishment of the WMD-free zone in the Middle East. The following comments constitute a modest attempt to draw a preliminary framework of the main elements that can pave the way for a future zone. I believe that the time has come to think aloud about a real and vibrant zone and identify the challenges and the opportunities ahead. Principally, I would like to highlight technical elements of the work ahead as a means of providing confidence to all states and initiating a meaningful dialogue on regional security.

Background

The proposal for the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons in the Middle East dates back to 1974 when the governments of Iran and Egypt called for such an arrangement at the UN General Assembly. In 1990, on Egypt's recommendation, the zonal idea was reaffirmed and its scope was extended to include the other two categories of weapons of mass destruction, that is, chemical and biological weapons. However, neither project detailed the main elements of such a zone, although the latter initiative provided for certain steps to be taken towards the establishment of the zone by the UN Security Council, the nuclear weapons states recognized by the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and the nations of the Middle East. In the same way, the Middle East Resolution which was adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference was not expected to deal with the main elements of the suggested zone.

An ad-hoc technical committee established by the League of Arab States was tasked with drafting a treaty on the establishment of a WMD-free zone. Even though the Committee made some progress, it was frozen in 2007 at the Riyadh Arab Summit as a result of the frustration caused by the lack of commitment by both regional and extra-regional stakeholders. The committee, when suspended, had yet to agree on and settle a number of key issues, such as verification mechanisms within the zone, as well as its geographical delimitation.

A Preliminary Framework for a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East

Six components of a possible future zone encompassing nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, as well as their delivery systems, stand out as being of particular importance. Each one of them deserves to be carefully considered.

Parties to the zone

The first key issue that needs to be addressed is the geographical delimitation of the zone. It would not be out of the ordinary for a WMD-free zone to be initially established by a core group of Middle Eastern countries, such as Egypt and other members of the League of Arab States, Israel, and Iran. In this regard, the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which established the Latin American nuclear weapon-free zone (NWFZ), provides an illuminating precedent since it allowed states to join the zone and be committed to it without awaiting the adherence of other states before the entry into

force of the Treaty.

However, without the presence of Israel and Iran, it would not be possible to reach such an arrangement in the Middle East. Hence, the establishment of the zone requires the participation of both countries in the negotiations over the establishment of the zone. In addition, there have been suggestions about the possibility of admitting Turkey to the zone, or at least, to accredit Turkey a special status as a neighboring state to the zone. Turkey is an active participant in Middle Eastern politics and carries great weight in current deliberations about the security of the region as a whole. The possible impediment to the adherence of Turkey to the zone, or to Turkish association with the zone, in one way or another, would be its NATO membership and the presence of American tactical nuclear weapons and defense missiles systems on Turkish territory.

There has also been speculation about considering the inclusion of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and even India to become part of the zone. However, their role in the project might bode well for the provision of security assurances to the actual members, rather than being themselves parties to the zone.

Weapons banned

All three categories of weapons of mass destruction must be included in the scope of a future zone. Nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons should also be broadly defined. Again, the Treaty of Tlatelolco does provide for a definition of nuclear weapons. A WMD-free zone agreement should follow suit.

Some argue that radiological weapons should be also incorporated, but this will complicate matters further for a variety of reasons, not least because there is no existing multilateral treaty on radiological weapons. As for the delivery systems associated with nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, the agreement should cover all sorts of delivery vehicles that are attractive for a WMD payload, including terrestrial, naval, and atmospheric means of delivery.

Main undertakings of the parties to a WMD-free zone

The parties to a WMD-free zone in the Middle East would be expected to reaffirm, in the text of the treaty establishing the zone, their commitment to continue to respect and honor their obligations therein. Most importantly, member states should adhere to the most important WMD-related treaties, such as the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention, and the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. At the same time, the members of a future WMD-free zone may also wish to be party to the main missile and export control related multilateral regimes, such as the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation, the Missile Technology Control Regime, and the Wassenaar Arrangement. They should also be active implementers of UN Security Council Resolution 1540, which deals with WMD terrorism, a rising topic of interest especially for the Middle Eastern region.

Regarding those states that have not yet adhered to all or some of these WMD-related treaties and conventions, they will be expected to join them during a specified timeframe starting from the date of the opening for signature of the WMD-free zone treaty. The main provisions of the WMD-free zone treaty may simply refer to all treaties and conventions related to the subject matter of a WMD-free zone that need to be adhered to by all parties to the zone. A referral provision may

turn out to be a practical procedure to follow. This should not exclude adding provisions that may be required in the special case of the Middle East zone, such as the establishment of a regional verification organization.

The need for a regional verification organization

In the nuclear field in particular, a regional organization could be similar to, and inspired by, the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) or the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC), possibly ending up with a system benefiting from a mixture of the two. This is an aspect that should receive special attention in the negotiations leading to a WMD-free zone. It should be recalled that the NPT verification and safeguards system is tailored to allow the IAEA and its inspectors to verify EURATOM inspections. The idea of mutual visits and inspections of nuclear facilities between Egypt and Israel was raised in talks between Amr Moussa, then foreign Minister of Egypt, and Shimon Peres, now President of Israel. However, those talks led nowhere as Peres refused to open up Dimona. The newly established regional verification organization should work closely with IAEA, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and a future setup for verifying the non-proliferation of biological weapons.

Security assurances

The NPT nuclear weapon states should be asked for negative security assurances, and possibly for positive security assurances. Whereas a negative security assurance is a guarantee by a state that possess nuclear weapons that it will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against states that do not possess nuclear weapons, a positive security assurance is a guarantee by a nuclear weapon state that it will come to the aid of a non-nuclear weapon state if it is attacked by another state with nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weapon states should also be willing to abide by any agreement banning the deployment of nuclear weapons in the region. A fitting example of good security assurances is provided by the 1995 UN Security Council Resolution 984. The resolution states that non-nuclear weapon members of the NPT would receive assurances that “the Security Council will act immediately in accordance with the relevant provisions of the UN Charter” to protect non-nuclear weapon states against attacks or threats of aggression in which nuclear weapons are used. Both positive and negative security assurances should be extended to cover the use and threat of use of chemical and biological weapons.

Pakistan and India may be able to offer negative security assurances similar to those provided by the NPT’s five nuclear weapon states with respect to existing NWFZs around the world. This issue may arise in negotiating the zone because it leads to the following serious question: would the parties to a WMD-free zone in the Middle East seek such assurances and guarantees from Pakistan and India, or would they consider such a step a recognition by the parties to the zone of the nuclear weapon status of both countries to the detriment of the NPT?

Peaceful nuclear cooperation

The establishment of a zone may open up opportunities for intensive cooperation in the area of peaceful uses of nuclear energy. For example, a possible outcome could be the establishment of

a regional nuclear fuel cycle, following one of the suggestions of the 2005 IAEA Expert Group report on multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle. As such, the expected multifaceted advantages are numerous, not least the beneficial spillover effects on mutual confidence and trust.

Final Thoughts

Facing these clear technical elements relating to the establishment of a WMD-free zone, there are obviously non-technical, that is political, obstacles that remain. However, it is my conviction that precisely through the process of discussion of these technicalities, political will and greater understanding of each side's considerations can be created. It is for this reason that I advocate an immediate commencement on such a project. The League of Arab States technical committee should be reformed and resume its work actively in close cooperation with all participants in the Helsinki Conference, including Iranians and Israelis, with task completion as a clear target. This is something that the Facilitator of the Middle East Action Plan can recommend be accomplished leading to the 2015 NPT Review Conference, although pursuing it through the NPT does not come without its own problems, especially if real progress towards the zone continues to lag.

An Arab Perspective on the Quest for a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East: Pipe-Dream or Security Option?

Wael Al-Assad

Arab states have three options for responding to Israel's nuclear capability: acquiescence, counter-balancing, or regional elimination of WMD. The consistent attitude of Arab states has been to work within the confines of international forums to pursue regional elimination. The most significant obstacle has been Israel's unwillingness to engage. To move forward, the attitudes of the conveners of the proposed 2012 conference should be critically examined.

Options for Arab Security

Security in the Middle East is a dynamic concept that is developed on the basis of threat perceptions and the defense requirements of the states in the region. The development of a regional security and arms control framework in the Middle East has always been a particularly difficult and daunting task due to the multi-polar nature of the region: we have, on the one hand, competing regional centers of power, and on the other hand, the interests of external powers. Today, the Middle East is poised at yet another critical juncture in its long and often turbulent history. With the recent rapid changes in the security structure of the region, all the regional powers are cautiously reassessing their political strengths and weaknesses and reevaluating their perceptions of threats and challenges.

For almost four decades, the Arab states have championed the cause of eliminating nuclear weapons from the Middle East. The idea that was first submitted to the UN General Assembly in 1974 provided a way out of the security dilemma the region faced. Since the 1960s, as information of Israel's nuclear program became public, the Arabs had three options to respond to the existence of such weapons in the region and in the hands of their nemesis. These options were: acceptance and coexistence; proliferation and counter-balance; or regional elimination. The first option was a non-starter and unacceptable. It was unthinkable to simply accept that Israel would obtain nuclear weapons, regardless of its policies (ambiguity/opacity or declaration). As a result the Arab states moved at the international fora to warn against the dangers of Israeli nuclear policies and its possible ramifications on regional security and peace.

Therefore, the second option of developing their own nuclear weapons to counter balance the Israeli threat was considered viable in the 1960s. Gamal Abdel Nasser, then President of Egypt, declared that if Israel can manufacture nuclear weapons, so will Egypt, because it becomes a matter of survival. This was a costly and dangerous option, but was a logical response to the perceived danger and would create equilibrium by ending Israel's nuclear monopoly. Furthermore, this was basically the same position of almost all states, such as the Soviet Union, Argentina, and Pakistan, when faced with the developing nuclear capabilities of their adversaries, the United States, Brazil, and India respectively. Although Egypt gave up this option at a later date, other states in the region have attempted to pursue it over the years as a result of inaction by the international community

against the Israeli nuclear program.

The third option—regional elimination of WMD—became the stronger and more dominant aspect of Arab policies during the 1970s. This option took concrete shape with the 1974 UN General Assembly Resolution on the creation of a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East. The Arab states adopted the idea and developed it into an initiative that they have been marketing at the international level for the last four decades.

Theoretically, this was a perfect solution as it provided a comprehensive regional approach to the nuclear dilemma, instead of the state-by-state approach which is evidently selective, biased, and intensifies the existing regional imbalances. But in spite of global support, and scores of resolutions issued at different international forums, the situation has remained static and no movement whatsoever has been taken towards realizing the idea. In the early 1990s, the idea was modified to include all weapons of mass destruction in an attempt to encourage Israel to engage in the process.

Enhancing Security Through Multilateral Means

The first substantive change came in the 1995 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review and Indefinite Extension Conference, when the three depository states (United Kingdom, United States, and Russia) cosponsored a resolution on the Middle East in order to secure the approval of the Arab states to the indefinite extension of the treaty. The aforementioned resolution called on the remaining countries in the region that were not parties to the NPT to accede as soon as possible and urged them to accept full scope IAEA safeguards. It also called on all states in the Middle East and all parties to the NPT to make every effort to establish a Middle East free of all nuclear and mass destruction weapons.¹ The Arabs naively accepted the deal and hailed the resolution as a victory. Despite being acknowledged as an integral part of the package deal of the extension of the NPT, the resolution had no implementing mechanism and no time frame, and in the subsequent fifteen years the situation remained unchanged.

The second major breakthrough came at the 2010 NPT Review Conference, which adopted a number of work plans, including one on the implementation of the 1995 Middle East resolution. The United States was adamant to make the 2010 Review Conference a success for a number of reasons, primarily because this was the first Review Conference for the Obama administration which, internationally at least, prided itself on a platform of disarmament and non-proliferation. President Obama's Prague speech and the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons would have been ridiculed had the conference failed, and mindful of this, they struck another deal with the Arabs and the non-aligned movement.

The Review Conference requested the UN Secretary General (UNSG), with the three states that cosponsored the 1995 Middle East resolution, and in consultation with regional states, to convene a conference in 2012 on the Middle East WMD-free zone. It was also noted that this conference should be the start of a process that would lead to the creation of the zone. For that purpose they were asked to appoint a facilitator for the conference and a host country.

The Arabs were relieved, for at last they had a practical mechanism that would allow them to start a

¹ [http://disarmament.un.org/vote.nsf/91a5e1195dc97a630525656f005b8adf/3a546b0a5ae381c88525709a006bf50b/\\$FILE/60-52.pdf](http://disarmament.un.org/vote.nsf/91a5e1195dc97a630525656f005b8adf/3a546b0a5ae381c88525709a006bf50b/$FILE/60-52.pdf) (accessed 25 May 2013)

serious process towards the establishment of the zone. Unfortunately, it was obvious immediately after the conference that the United States and Israel were unhappy with the outcomes regarding the Middle East. Israel declared its dissatisfaction and stated that, because it was not an NPT member, it was therefore not bound by the conference outcomes. The Arabs waited for the conveners of the 2012 conference to appoint the facilitator and the host state, but it took the conveners over fourteen months to appoint Ambassador Jaakko Laajava as facilitator and Finland as host country. This delay amounted to almost half the time that was allotted to prepare and convene the conference! The delay was never explained and was perceived by the Arab states as a sign of disinterest by the conveners, especially the United States. The facilitator started his work with the conveners and the parties in the region immediately, but it became obvious that the conveners themselves were not a united front and would not easily agree on any proposal - they became part of the problem not the solution.

On the other side, the Arabs tried to engage positively, establishing a senior officials committee that was entrusted to provide one united Arab position. The Senior Officials Committee asked for concrete ideas from the facilitator and provided him with a non paper that provided the Arab vision of the modalities, procedures, and expected outcomes of that conference. The facilitator could not accommodate any of the important Arab proposals. This led to huge frustration among the Arab states and to the feeling that they were negotiating with the facilitator only and not the other players, as they did not receive any ideas or input from the Israelis. The Arabs declared their intention to attend the conference, and at a later stage the Iranians declared their intention to participate as well; both requested the conference to be held on time and within the mandate and terms of reference of the conference. Only Israel has remained silent and ambiguous about its intention.

As time passed, 2012 was almost over, and with no positive attempts at holding the conference, the conveners (the three depository states, the UNSG and the facilitator) officially declared the postponement of the conference. They did not fix a new date or a time limit, or even provide good reasons for the postponement. Furthermore, they announced the postponement via five separate national statements, a clear sign of serious disagreement among the conveners. The Russians were the most clear in stating their discontent. A new date should have been fixed (before the second preparatory committee of the NPT Review Conference) and postponement should only be declared if states in the region approved. Obviously neither was done.

Diagnosis and Possible Ways Ahead

From an Arab point of view, the most serious problem has been the lack of political will to engage by the Israelis. They cannot see the opportunities and benefits of participating, but focus instead on the threats. Their refusal to engage is protected by the United States and, furthermore, they have refused to join any disarmament convention or treaty and yet receive little or no criticism for this position.

Through the course of the last two years, Israel and some of the conveners have repeated two major ideas that they see need to be addressed. The first is that we need to have peace in the region before Israel can join the NPT or even discuss a WMD-free zone. But this is, in reality, a reversed logic. The Arab states, all 22 of them, joined the NPT during the Arab-Israeli conflict and did not use the conflict as pretext for not joining. In addition, nuclear free zones are considered a major confidence building measure; the proposed WMD-free zone in the Middle East will open doors

for cooperation and security dialogue among the states of the region, and thereby induce an atmosphere of trust that should help any efforts towards real peace. Peace and the zone are mutually reinforcing but neither should be a precondition for the other.

The second idea is that Israel is not an NPT party, therefore is not bound by any obligations of the 1995 Resolution or the 2010 Final Document and work plan. The United States and the United Kingdom, although they have accepted the responsibility to hold the meeting, keep repeating that Israel has no responsibility towards these obligations. If that was the case, why did they co-sponsor such resolutions in such forums? Why did they strike deals with mutual obligations if they knew that Israel is not bound by them. The only reasonable explanation is that these countries had no intention of fulfilling their promises or shouldering their responsibilities. They simply wanted the conferences to be viewed as successes and get other results they were keen to achieve.

This attitude is dangerous and will backfire on the whole multilateral community. For if we adopt resolutions and agreements with no intention of honoring our part of the deal, others will consider the whole process null and void, and will not take their part in the deal seriously. As a way forward, the attitudes of the co-sponsors of the 2012 Middle East WMD-free zone conference must be critically examined and addressed in order to bring Israel into realistic engagement with the process. The whole non-proliferation regime will otherwise suffer as it will continue to lose credibility.

Conclusion: Keep the Ball Rolling

Paolo Foradori

The prospects for convening a conference on the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East appear bleak today. One year ago, in the late autumn 2012, expectations for holding a conference in the following December were high and the issue featured prominently on the international agenda. Nobody, of course, underestimated the formidable obstacles the parties had to overcome for the event to materialize and even the most ardent supporters of the WMD-free zone proposal did not assume the conference would be anything more than the beginning of a process, which would necessarily be long, complex, and would hold no guarantee of success. The image of a ball that had begun to roll—and it was vital to keep it rolling, no matter how slowly—was very common in the lively discussions and debates among diplomats, experts, and academics that flourished in and outside the Middle East region after the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference’s bold decision to take practical steps to break the long stalemate on the implementation of the 1995 Middle East Resolution.

Today, in contrast to that hopeful atmosphere, even the modest goal of starting a long-term process appears ambitious, and pessimistic views dominate even among those observers who used to consider the WMD-free zone a challenging but ultimately feasible objective. The political momentum gathered at the 2010 NPT Review Conference and amplified after the appointment of the facilitator in 2011 has largely dissipated over the past year. The initiative has been lost and it now seems very difficult for all the actors involved—the regional states, the conveners, the United Nations, the facilitator, but also the NGO community that has been involved in different capacities in the WMD-free zone project—to get reorganized and make substantial progress toward the end-goal of eliminating all weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East.

Old problems plaguing the WMD-free zone project persist with little or no sign of improvement: the acute lack of trust between states in the region after decades of war and conflict; the continued and widespread belief in the utility of weapons of mass destruction; the absence of regional institutions to facilitate and support negotiation and confidence-building; and differences over the scope of the prohibitions in question and over the means of verification.²

The issue of the sequence of steps leading to the establishment of the zone continues to stand out as the most formidable conceptual, as well as practical, obstacle that hampers progress, given a hard-to-reconcile divide between the Israeli “peace first, zone second” approach and the Arab and Iranian “zone first, peace second” approach. Israel has long maintained that it will discuss entering into a WMD-free zone only after a durable regional peace agreement is reached, considering WMD arms control and disarmament only one element of a broader regional cooperative security system that has to be worked out and enforced in the Middle East. Arabs and Iranians, however, argue that peace cannot be achieved with a nuclear-armed Israel and hence Israeli nuclear disarmament must precede peace and normalization. In fact, they maintain that the establishment of WMD-free zone would contribute to peaceful relations as a confidence-building measure. As the

² For a review of the many obstacles to a Middle East WMD-free zone, see Paolo Foradori and Martin B. Malin, “A WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East: Creating the Conditions for Sustained Progress.” Discussion Paper, Project on Managing the Atom, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, December 2012.

former Iranian diplomat Hossein Mousavian writes, “the process of establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East can potentially facilitate a security arrangement and help find a just peace to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East.”¹

A Time of Challenges and Rare Opportunities

In the meantime, the regional context in which the WMD-free zone proposal is supposed to take place has radically changed. It is hard to predict whether these evolving transformations will favor conditions for progress toward the WMD-free zone end-goal, or will add further complications. If, as already noted, the obstacles appear overwhelming, elements of the new regional landscape could help to foster regional cooperative security and WMD-disarmament. In this regard, three issues deserve special consideration: 1) the advancing of the Iranian nuclear program and the fate of negotiations with the P5+1 countries; 2) the gradual erosion of the Israeli regional nuclear monopoly; 3) the use of chemical weapons in Syria and the prospects of their elimination. Before briefly turning to each of them, some initial reflections on the spectacular changes that have rocked the Middle East are due.

The changing regional context

The possible impact of the revolutionary transitions sweeping through the Middle East on the WMD-free zone proposal is mixed, with short-term negative consequences likely, yet cautious hope for more positive outcomes in the long-term. The regional upheavals have brought about more instability and radicalization in the immediate run and increased the uncertainty surrounding the prospects for near-term negotiation on the schedule and agenda of the postponed Helsinki conference. From Libya to Syria, from Egypt to Tunisia, from Yemen to Jordan, Arab revolutions have amplified tensions, thus making the regional landscape even more problematic and volatile. Moreover, ongoing transitions are causing the priorities of regional leaders to shift from advancing the WMD-free zone project to more pressing domestic issues. The risk that the Arab revolutions might radicalize public opinion should not be underestimated. One can easily imagine a scenario in which the more radical elements of any newly elected Islamist government shift the public discourse towards more hardline positions on WMD issues.

In a medium-to-long term perspective, however, there are reasons to argue that the Arab revolts can create opportunities for progress towards a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction. Should the transitions succeed and drastic political and economic reforms take place, one could expect a more democratic and peaceful Middle East to emerge. The experience of the other existing free-zones demonstrates that regional leaders might be more amenable to serious negotiations, as democratizing countries are more likely to enter into nuclear weapons-free zone (NWFZ) treaties. The fact that the leaderships of emerging democracies appear to be more receptive to the non-proliferation norms should not be underplayed, as in the past this has caused those with nascent or limited nuclear programs to terminate their activities.² Moreover, if the radicalization of Middle East societies is a present danger, the progressive empowerment of the public might well lead to

¹ Seyed Hossein Mousavian, *Iran-Europe Relations: Challenges and Opportunities*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 144.

² Harald Müller and Andreas Schmidt, “The Little Known Story of De-Proliferation: Why States Give Up Nuclear Weapon Activities,” in William C. Potter and Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, eds., *Forecasting Nuclear Proliferation in the 21st Century: The Role of Theory*, Vol. 1 (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010). pp. 124–158.

positive developments, whereby a more active, free, and informed public can question secretive and costly WMD programs sponsored by unaccountable military-industrial cliques or indeed even the real value of expensive civilian nuclear programs.

The Iranian nuclear program

The Iranian nuclear program is of growing concern for the international community, as the country is slowly but steadily advancing its nuclear capabilities. Tehran is de facto moving close to achieving a nuclear weapons capability, which would enable the Islamic Republic to make a nuclear bomb relatively quickly, if it so chooses. Although Tehran continues to declare that its nuclear activities are exclusively for peaceful purposes, many countries in and outside the region are deeply suspicious of its real intentions. The threat of a US or Israeli military attack against Iranian nuclear facilities is horrifying but very real.

Although Iran has supported the establishment of a NWFZ in the past, and in early November 2012 announced its intention to attend the proposed WMD-free zone conference, its position since the 2010 NPT Review Conference toward the 2012 proposal has been less than constructive.³

However, Iran may come to see the WMD-free zone discussion as an opportunity to advance its interests. Iran has a strategic interest in denuclearizing Israel and negotiations on a zone are essentially the only way to accomplish that objective. Additionally, regional security discussions can help Iran break out of isolation; furthermore, they would split the US-Arab coalition against its nuclear development and focus attention on Israel's nuclear weapons; finally, the creation of a zone, if it were to occur in the next several years, would leave Iran far ahead of its Arab neighbors in fuel cycle and latent nuclear weapons capability, while reducing the incentives for its neighbors to attempt to match its investment.⁴

Moreover, despite the current stalemate in the talks between Iran and the P5+1 countries, the election of Hassan Rouhani as the new president of Iran, and the departure of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, brings some cautious optimism for a breakthrough in the negotiations. Evidently, it is too early to say if this change in leadership will indeed bear fruit and move the two sides closer. Without doubt, however, Rouhani's first statements and gestures have contributed to creating a much more positive atmosphere in which the negotiators can engage in more serious, constructive, and substantial talks for a win-win deal.

Getting Israel on board

Israel's participation in a process to establish a WMD-free zone is uncertain, and Israeli leaders

³ Iran did not participate in the November 2011 IAEA-sponsored Forum on the experience of other regions in creating WMD-free zones. Iran's public position has been to call on Israel to declare its arsenal and be disarmed, upon which the de facto establishment of a zone would be complete (see Elaine M. Grossman, "Amid Dim Prospects for Mideast WMD Summit, Some Hopes Glimmer," Global Security Newswire, October 1, 2012, <http://www.nti.rsvp1.com/gsn/article/amid-dim-prospects-mideast-wmdsummit-some-hopes-glimmer/?mgh=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nti.org&mgf=1>).

⁴ Foradori and Malin, "A WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East: Creating the Conditions for Sustained Progress," pp. 29-30.

have long been openly skeptical about the utility of a conference on this issue. Inevitably, however, a meaningful process depends on Israel's presence at the negotiating table.

Although many observers believe that Israel will never give up its nuclear arsenal, which is considered a life insurance against neighboring hostile countries—some of which do not even recognize its right to exist—there are reasons to argue that even Israel may come to consider the WMD-free zone proposal as an option.⁵ The new fact is that the nuclear status quo in the Middle East is no longer sustainable and Israel's nuclear monopoly is under threat due to Iran's advancing nuclear capability. Over the long term, potentially, the growth and spread of nuclear energy in the Middle East and the new political forces shaping the region may also change Israel's strategic outlook. In response to the changing strategic environment, one could argue that Israeli leaders may come to see entering into negotiations with their neighbors to establish a WMD-free zone the least unpalatable option, while also considering that alternative security strategies—i.e. prevention through sabotage, assassination, and military strikes; or deterrence, initially aimed at Iran and, eventually, perhaps other states in the region—appear to be less sustainable, attractive, and effective options.

The oft-threatened Israeli military option against Iran appears especially dangerous. First, a military strike on Iran will not be a 'surgical' action, but will inevitably lead to major military confrontations with destabilizing effects on the entire region and likely negative effects on the global economy. As the former head of the Mossad argued, such an attack will "ignite a regional war."⁶ Second, it is likely to miss its stated objective—preventing a nuclear-armed Iran—while at best setting the Iranian nuclear program back a few years, but at the same time causing the Iranian leadership to make the final decision in favor of building a nuclear bomb.

Moreover, Israel's participation in the WMD-free zone conference would allow it to prolong its nuclear weapons monopoly with the fewest challenges for an interim period, while negotiating the terms of a transition to a nuclear and WMD-free Middle East.

Syrian chemical weapons disarmament

The use of chemical weapons in Syria has been a dramatic event. The fact that WMD have once again been used in the region can potentially deal a major blow to the conference's proposal. However, here again, one could make the argument that this tragedy might create an opportunity for progress to the objective of eliminating nonconventional weapons from the Middle East. To the extent that the recent Syrian accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) leads to the swift and verified securing and destruction of its chemical weapons, then this might cause other countries to strengthen their non-proliferation and disarmament obligations, and eventually come clean about their WMD. If Syria chemically disarms, then Egypt and Israel could feel the pressure to ratify the CWC themselves. A similar process could then be prompted in the field of biological weapons. In short, starting from the Syrian chemical weapons, it might be possible to make links with the other types of WMD present today in the Middle East, eventually including the Israeli nuclear arsenal.

It is important to recall that the current proposal for a WMD-free zone in the Middle East originated

⁵ See Foradori and Malin, "A WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East: Creating the Conditions for Sustained Progress," pp. 30-33.

⁶ Quoted in the New York Daily News, March 11, 2012, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/ex-mossad-boss-meir-dagan-israeli-attack-iran-stupidist-article-1.1037219#ixzz2HlgjmuOw>

from the traditional nuclear weapons-free zone concept and was only expanded to include all categories of WMD, in addition to nuclear weapons, in 1990 on the initiative of former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. The reason for linking bans on chemical and biological weapons with a ban on nuclear weapons was to encourage positive trade-offs in a WMD disarmament process and to attract the support of Israel and the United States. Indeed, Israel has often hinted at the need to keep a WMD force to deter the non-conventional capabilities of its Arab neighbors and of Iran.

There is of course a great deal of wishful thinking in this scenario. The point is, however, that the international community should take advantage of the ongoing destruction process of the Syrian chemical weapons, of the renewed agreement by the United States and Russia on the issue, and of the international public support for WMD disarmament, to put pressure on the regional states to address the WMD issue in earnest and good faith, so resuming and boosting the WMD-free zone proposal.

Conclusion

The political and security landscape of the Middle East continues to be extremely complex and volatile. Formidable obstacles, old and new, need to be overcome to turn the WMD-free zone proposal into a feasible project, although some positive developments should not be dismissed. In this very turbulent and confused context, the only certainty is that the Helsinki Conference must be held as soon as possible, if for no other reason than keeping alive “the process to begin a process.”

The window of opportunity opened by the 2010 NPT Review Conference’s decision to convene a conference is quickly closing, and, once closed, it would be extremely difficult to open again. If the Helsinki Conference does not take place prior to the 2015 NPT Review Conference, the entire WMD-free zone project is at risk of fatal failure. This will deal a major blow not only to the prospect of improving regional security in the Middle East, but also to the non-proliferation regime itself. If the efforts to begin discussions on a WMD-free zone in the Middle East collapse, certain states in the region will question the value of the NPT itself and may eventually reconsider whether they wish to continue to be bound by the treaty. The Egyptian decision to walk out of the NPT Preparatory Committee Meeting in Geneva this April, in protest of the conference’s postponement, is an unequivocal signal of a growing frustration that may soon reach a breaking point.⁷

If in 2010 hopes were for a meaningful conference by 2012, now a conference, any conference, at the latest by the beginning of 2014, is the objective. It is no longer true that a failed conference is worse than no conference. The mere act of holding a conference might be considered a success. For this to happen, of course, the conference will have to tightly limit its scope and the conveners must manage expectations. For the time being, all parties should be satisfied with a minimalist agenda, in which rhetoric and choreography will inevitably exceed substance. The conference should at least aim to produce a declaration of principles, in which every state in the region expresses their support for the concept of establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East and commits to a second round with, ideally, a fixed date. Under the present circumstances, this alone would represent a significant achievement, and the ball could continue rolling. At least for a while.

⁷ Egypt’s statement is available at: http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/pre-pcom13/statements/29April_Egypt.pdf

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About the Project on Managing the Atom

The Project on Managing the Atom (MTA) is the Harvard Kennedy School's principal research group on nuclear policy issues. Established in 1996, the purpose of the MTA project is to provide leadership in advancing policy-relevant ideas and analysis for reducing the risks from nuclear and radiological terrorism; stopping nuclear proliferation and reducing nuclear arsenals; lowering the barriers to safe, secure, and peaceful nuclear-energy use; and addressing the connections among these problems. Through its fellows program, the MTA project also helps to prepare the next generation of leaders for work on nuclear policy problems. The MTA project provides its research, analysis, and commentary to policy makers, scholars, journalists, and the public.

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