

EU Non-PROLIFERATION CONSORTIUM

The European network of independent non-proliferation think tanks

EU Seminar to promote confidence building and in support of a process aimed at establishing a zone free of WMD and means of delivery in the Middle East

Brussels

6-7 July, 2011

Final assessment by Camille Grand,

Chairman of the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium¹

It is a difficult task to try to draw lessons from such a substantial seminar. I will therefore not try to provide a comprehensive summary of the debates nor an additional presentation with my own views, but more modestly or ambitiously (it is for you to judge), attempt to highlight some of the key findings (at least from my perspective) that could help things move forward.

First of all, the wide participation and the active involvement of all participants from the region and beyond in the debates are, as such, encouraging and important signals. Beyond real disagreements that should not be overlooked, it does demonstrate in my view the readiness of key players to engage in a forward-looking process.

The European Union's initiative to hold the seminar did receive broad support and some participants even suggested thinking about a follow-up event, while many nevertheless stressed that it was not a substitute for other venues in the context of the preparation for the 2012 conference.

As expected, the debate on regional security was difficult demonstrating that security perceptions and concerns in the region remain extremely diverging.

¹ The EU Non-Proliferation Consortium is a network of independent non-proliferation think tanks to encourage discussion of measures to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems within civil society, particularly among experts, researchers and academics. Any opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium or any of its individual institutes or of the EU.

Assessments varied on the evolution of the regional security landscape, some focusing on the good news, including in the WMD proliferation field (i.e. expanded participation in the global regimes over the last 15 years) and the decrease in the number of existential threats, others emphasizing the bad news with on-going conflicts and crises, including those associated with WMD and missile proliferation developments in the region. Work towards establishing a cooperative security regime, promoting regional trust and confidence (at least at a minimum level) was perceived as a matter of priority or even urgency.

In the relationship between establishing a WMDFZ and the security landscape, addressing the security concerns was perceived as a necessary step, but many participants expressed the view that the improvement of the security environment could not be seen as a pre-condition for further steps in the field of non-proliferation or arms control, even if the two issues cannot be dissociated.

With regard to the regional implementation of non-proliferation measures, all issues, including the most difficult ones were discussed, from the lack of universalization of the key non-proliferation treaties to the existence of several unresolved and serious non-compliance cases in the region.

Adherence to other non-proliferation tools beyond the three core multilateral treaties (NPT, CWC, and BTWC) was also discussed, and participants helped to identify other possible useful steps regarding the room for progress in implementing all treaties and mechanisms associated with WMD and missile proliferation.

Options to deepen dialogue were discussed, and many proposals were offered by participants. The importance of taking into account the lessons of the ACRS process of the 1990s was underscored. Special focus is needed on CBMs, crucial in all phases of the process.

The possibility of achieving significant progress short of establishing a full-fledged WMDFZ or of universal accession to the three key treaties was perceived as a distinct opportunity that should not be sidelined. Amongst the various proposals, joint regional ratification of the CTBT, the BTWC or joining the HCoC are all interesting significant steps with confidence-building effects and limited security constraints. More broadly, there was a general acknowledgement that a WMDFZ implies going beyond the universality of relevant treaties and negotiating a specific agreement providing inter alia for a specific and more inclusive verification regime.

As far as a framework for further negotiation is concerned, many options were explored which were not perceived as being mutually exclusive: the dynamics between bilateral, regional and universal approaches seem to be a key for achieving significant progress. I believe everyone acknowledges that the absence of a regional framework is a significant handicap.

Moreover, regarding the question of the timeline, I share the view expressed by many participants that the WMDFZ is a long-term prospect, given the complexity of the issue and the challenges ahead. Having said this, it should not prevent forward movement now on

exploring the best venues for the process and the appropriate confidence building measures. Concrete progress can be achieved almost immediately on some important issues; it is up to the countries in the region to be resolute.

With regard to a dedicated 2012 conference as enshrined in the 2010 NPT final document, all NPT parties are of course committed to this objective, and I endorse the call to appoint a facilitator as soon as possible; time is indeed running short if the target date is to be met.

Naturally, there are unresolved issues concerning the nature and the framework of the meeting, the location and logistics of a process and the expected end result. Listening to our discussion, I however believe that a reasonable compromise can be achieved.

The list of parameters to be addressed (scope, verification, entry into force/withdrawal, role of extra regional states) seems a reasonable approach in spite of the fact that it does not address all the political challenges associated with the idea of a zone. The creation of a (regional or broader) group of experts would seem to be a very useful step in exploring the technicalities of a WMDFZ.

With regard to peaceful uses, I note that, in the aftermath of Fukushima, no participants from the region expressed the view that civilian nuclear ambitions will or should be abandoned. I sense, however, a growing concern with nuclear safety and security which has to be taken into account as it could open opportunities for regional cooperation in a less sensitive yet nonetheless essential domain. Options for multi-nationalizing the fuel cycle were discussed, but the conflicting objectives behind the various approaches lead me to believe that it is a distinct issue to be discussed in a different framework, as it might further complicate the WMDFZ issue.

The EU's role was often mentioned from two different perspectives:

- The European historical example in terms of CBMs and cooperation was cited recalled;
- The role of Europe as a facilitator, as in the last two days.

Some important policy issues

1. Everybody acknowledges the tremendous challenges ahead and the fact that the process leading to the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East might be long and complex. However this should not preclude efforts to begin a process, the will to start it now and to be ambitious;
2. The ultimate objective is enhancing the security of each and every country in the region and regional security as a whole;
3. Although a legitimate focus has been placed on nuclear weapons during the seminar, biological weapons, chemical weapons and missiles (the latter two have been used in the Middle East) should be part of the debate;

4. A step by step approach would be wise, and many steps (in terms of accession to existing agreements and potential voluntary or negotiated CBMs) can be achieved within a very reasonable time-frame;
5. There will be a greater chance of holding an inclusive and successful 2012 conference if everyone accepts that the actual negotiation framework is yet to be agreed upon by all the countries in the region;
6. Meetings of smaller groups of regional actors could help to defuse complicated issues ahead of major events involving countries from the whole Middle East region and the wider international community;
7. Bilateral, plurilateral, regional and universal approaches are not mutually exclusive, and can be mutually reinforcing;
8. The value of track 2 or track 1.5 discussions should not be underestimated, and can help to think out of the box; the EEAS and the EU non-proliferation consortium could envisage follow-up events to the seminar in the run-up to a conference, although it is not for me to decide.

In order to respect the Chatham House Rule, I have deliberately not given credit to all the participants who actively contributed to the debate enabling me to put these ideas together.

I have also left aside many important ideas; these will hopefully be reflected in our factual report on the seminar that will be circulated to participants after the seminar.

I am of course solely responsible for all shortcomings.

Let me end on a personal note. As a non-proliferation expert, I was amongst those who were skeptical about the feasibility of setting up a process leading to the establishment of a zone free of WMD and means of delivery in such a short time frame. However, I must say that the quality of the exchanges and the substantial proposals made during this seminar have made me slightly more optimistic.

It has been a great privilege to be part of a seminar which combined the best of academic debate (fresh thinking, frank and direct debates) and the best of diplomatic events (the participation of senior decision-makers and policy-driven recommendations).

Many thanks to all of you.