

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference Second Plenary Session - Non-Proliferation and Security in the Middle East

As introduced by session chair Camille Grand, Director of the Fondation Pour la Recherche Stratégique and President of the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium, the topic of this panel was dear to the heart of the Consortium; it was the subject of an EU seminar organised by the Consortium last July and a matter in which the Consortium maintains active involvement.

[HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal](#), Chairman of the Board of the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, said the Arab states had embraced the goal of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons, and other weapons of mass destruction. Israel has ignored this goal and Iran had paid it lip service while pursuing uranium enrichment and other suspicious activities that raise doubts about its commitment. Iran's activities, he said, 'will compel other countries in the area to pursue policies that could lead to untold and possibly dramatic consequences'. Military strikes would be entirely counterproductive, but there were non-military policy alternatives, as yet unexplored, that could have the desired result. He emphasised that Iran and all countries in the region have the right to peaceful nuclear energy but said that parlaying that programme into nuclear weapons is a dead end. Hence the need for a zone free of WMD, which must be accompanied by incentives of economic and technical support for countries that join; a nuclear-security umbrella guaranteed by the permanent members of the UN Security Council; political and economic sanctions for countries that do not join; and military sanctions against those countries that try to develop WMD. The Arab Peace Initiative, originally outlined by Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah in 2002, should also be adopted as the only viable way to bring about regional peace. It was time to move away from crisis management to crisis resolution.

In ending, Prince Turki emphasised the principle of openness as the solution to many of the challenges facing the region, including the nuclear issues posed by programmes in Israel and Iran. His call for openness was echoed by several other participants – although one participant wondered whether a reversal of Israel's policy of nuclear opacity wouldn't increase pressure on Arab governments to either seek to equal Israel's nuclear capability or to confront it.

[Bernd Kubbig](#), from the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), focused on the issue of missiles as a microcosm of the wider problem of proliferation in the region and as a way of contributing to the solution. He noted the growth of missiles and missile defences in the region, in terms of both vertical and horizontal proliferation, and the influences of military-industrial complexes. It was wise that the international community added missiles to the agenda for the 2012 Conference because this added to the potential for negotiated trade-offs 'freely arrived at'. The 2012 Conference would be a golden opportunity for states in the region to overcome the lack of direct communication. Europeans could help, he said, through concrete outreach activities aimed at sharing norms with young diplomats and journalists and, in the mid- to long-term, in the institutionalisation of arms control and mediation concepts for the Middle East entrenched in regional security centres. As an example, he cited a multilateral study group organised by PRIF in which an Iranian participant and an Israeli counterpart suggested capping the ranges of their respective missile forces so that they could not reach each other's territory. Later, when his focus on missiles was challenged, he noted that missiles and rockets matter because they kill people almost every day and because without missiles, nuclear weapons are sitting ducks.

[Sameh Aboul-Enein](#), from the Egyptian Foreign Ministry and American University Cairo, suggested adding 'disarmament' to the title of the session because security in the Middle East would require the dismantlement of nuclear weapons by those who possessed them. Before elaborating on that point, he touched on the Arab Spring, saying it would significantly impact not only domestic issues, but also foreign policy and disarmament policies because governments will become more accountable to public opinion. He did not anticipate dramatic policy U-turns, at least in the immediate future, but foreign-policy objectives would have to be synchronised with the aspirations of the people.

Emphasising the importance that Egypt placed on the Middle East WMD Free Zone issue during the upcoming NPT review cycle process, he said it was important to capitalise on the unique opportunity presented by the 2012 Conference. It should not be viewed as a one-off event – a view that was seconded by several other participants. Rather, he said, the 2012 Conference should begin a process culminating in the adoption of a legally binding treaty text, with concrete measures including efficient verification. Participation in the conference should be inclusive, including Israel, Iran and members of the League of Arab States, with a provision for observers. The right to peaceful use of nuclear energy must be accepted, with respect for sovereign decisions in this regard and

the facilitation of technology transfer, as called for in the NPT. He also called for universality of the NPT and for strict compliance with its provisions, in terms of disarmament as well as non-proliferation obligations. He emphasized the central role of civil society in the future of security in the Middle East and said NGOs should be given opportunities to present constructive ideas and initiatives. He welcomed the EU Consortium and suggested the group engage more with counterparts in the Arab World and the Middle East.

[Ariel Levite](#), from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, offered a personal view from Tel Aviv ('not from Jerusalem'), focusing on a different perspective on security in light of the unfolding events in the region. On the one hand, the collapse of the old order in the Arab world inspired hope for an improved regional and domestic order, bringing prosperity, social justice, democratic participation, freedom, dignity, sovereignty, disarmament and stability. At the same time, there are those who were trying to seize on the new opportunities that had been created by the unsettled regional scene to attain leverage, asymmetric advantage and control. Suggesting the need for prioritising objectives, he advocated practical steps to create a fairer and more sustainable order in the short to medium term, while contemplating steps that would lay the ground for realising more ambitious goals in the longer term. A first priority should be to reconstitute domestic order, including the control of governments over their own territory. Arresting the most acute proliferation challenges was the second issue, he said, given that current trends were making the goals of a WMD-free zone in the region even more distant. Urgent steps were also needed in the Arab-Israeli peace process as well as more sustained progress on issues of coexistence. In conclusion, he said the region had reached a critical juncture 'well before the conference is convened in 2012, assuming it is convened in 2012'; steps must be taken to ensure that the current cycle of violence in the Middle East did not spin out of control.

Later in the session Levite said the greatest accomplishment of the 2012 Conference would be if it were to be delinked from the NPT and made much more Middle-East specific. In his view, the NPT was an impediment, rather than a help, in that it encompassed a bargain whereby states could legitimately advance nuclear technologies that put them 90 days away from nuclear weapons, at which point they could withdraw from the treaty without penalty. A different kind of norm was needed, he said, that provided a more acceptable distinction between legitimate and illegitimate nuclear activity.

In the [Q&A period](#), Nabeela Al-Mulla, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Brussels, called for key states of the region to join the Convention on Nuclear Safety and to provide for stress tests of existing nuclear reactors for the sake of regional confidence. She and others also called for ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, a step that Aboul-Enein said had to be discussed in the context of the entire agenda for the zone.

Hans Blix, Director General Emeritus of the IAEA, noted the problem posed by Iran's uranium enrichment programme and suggested that while a short-term solution would require capping the level of enrichment, in the long term a voluntary agreement by the states of the region to forgo uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing would be a useful goal.

Pierre Goldschmidt of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace asked about the definition of the Middle East, which he noted the IAEA characterised as extending to Mauritania and the Comoros, but not Turkey. Prince Turki said it should include Turkey but not necessarily African countries such as Mozambique. Kubbig countered that, from an Iranian perspective, Pakistan could be a problem if it were not included.

Teng Jianqun from the China Institute of International Studies said the military intervention that toppled Colonel Muammar Gadhafi had a negative impact on global non-proliferation efforts because of the lesson it gave to countries such as North Korea on the dangers of unilateral disarmament. In response, Prince Turki said the fact that Gadhafi gave up his nuclear weapons programme had nothing to do with the Libyan people's uprising against him and that the multilateral intervention that followed was in accordance with the UN Security Council process.

Vladimir Orlov, Director of the PIR Centre in Moscow, welcomed the attention that people in Brussels were giving to the 2012 Conference, in sharp contrast to the lack of interest to be found in Washington. Failure or even postponement of the conference would significantly damage the NPT review process.