

A think piece on confidence-building measures in the Middle East

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Background paper

Second EU Non-Proliferation Consortium 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

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Abbreviations

ACRS	Arms Control and Regional Security
CBMs	Confidence-Building Measures
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
MENWFZ	Middle East Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone
NWFZ	Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SESAME	Synchrotron-Light for Experimental Science and Applications for the Middle East
UN	United Nations
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WMDFZ	Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone

1. Introduction

The most obvious and perhaps the most useful first step is to address the issue of endemic mistrust and launch confidence-building measures (CBMs) among all parties. In fact, such methods were investigated previously; the United Nations study on the 'Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East'¹ suggested a list of CBMs², and the ACRS process included a combination of conceptual and operational CBMs³.

2. Security Assurances

The complexity of the Middle Eastern issue calls for both positive security assurances – guarantees that nuclear weapon states 'will act immediately' in the event of a nuclear attack on a non-nuclear weapon state party to the NPT – and negative security assurances – guarantees that nuclear weapon states will refrain from using nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon state parties to the NPT. These can be broadened to include chemical and biological weapons as well, and can range from specific assurances to very broad ones. A 2009 CNS report suggested that states can provide broader negative security assurances to one another regardless of their possession of WMD⁴—in fact, it might be useful for the states to go so far as to reinstate non-aggression pacts which had been abandoned after WWII.

Two major CBMs that could be established in the medium term are the introduction of a region-wide test ban to cover all WMD and the creation of a region-wide no-first-use regime.

3. Regionalism

The conflict pattern, and thus the rationale for WMD proliferation in the Middle East, is inherently regional⁵. Therefore, in order to reverse the situation, regional solutions must be found; regional insecurity cannot be alleviated without altering regional relations⁶. Although the NPT, the Additional Protocol and IAEA safeguards are recognized as legitimate and effective, they are not sufficient for the region due to its unique history and sensitivities⁷. Therefore regional institutions and verification methods should be established.

One way of fostering dialogue and cooperation, and hence breaking isolation, is through regional organizations. In 2004, Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal proposed the inclusion of Iran and Yemen in the GCC, and argued that the region should not depend on the

¹ United Nations Document A/RES/45/52

² M. K. Said, Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone: Regional Security and Non-Proliferation Issues, In: V. C. al., Building a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East: Global Non-Proliferation Regimes and Regional Experiences, Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, (2004), (pp. 123-133).

³ Monterey Nonproliferation Strategy Group. Nuclear Weapon Free Zones and the Middle East. Monterey: James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, (2009).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ M. K. Said, Security and Defense Dilemmas in the Middle East. The Nuclear Dimension, in: Pugwash Meeting no. 279. London, (2002).

⁶ A. Flibbert, After Saddam. Regional Insecurity, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Proliferation Pressures in Postwar Iraq, in: Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 118 No. 4 (2003/2004), pp. 547-567.

⁷ Monterey Nonproliferation Strategy Group. Nuclear Weapon Free Zones and the Middle East. Monterey: James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, (2009).

US for its security⁸. The inclusion of Iran in a security organization which was traditionally led by one of its rivals, Saudi Arabia, might raise several questions at first glance. Yet this experiment might resemble the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is centred on two poles, Russia and China, which compete, among other things, to increase their influence over the other Central Asian member states of the organization. Although the alliance never evolved into a NATO-like structure, it has had significant effects on regional security because of its nature as a platform for solving territorial issues, tackling joint security issues such as terrorism and illicit drug trafficking, and stimulating bilateral and multilateral economic relations, especially in the energy sector. This effect could be replicated in the Middle East, through broadening membership to already existing organizations, or forming new ones that are more inclusive and less comprehensive and demanding. Such an organization could have an agenda ranging from earthquake security to oil clean-up, from shipping safety to security of nuclear power stations⁹; what is important is not the agenda, but paving the way for dialogue and cooperation among states which traditionally compete against each other.

Middle Eastern states should be reminded that they have several areas in which they can cooperate. All states involved in the region, even eminent rivals such as the US and Iran, share interests in stabilizing Afghanistan and Pakistan in order to stop the flow of drugs, arms and extremists, as well as in ensuring that oil supplies and prices remain stable¹⁰. There are also other areas in which particular groups of states share interests, such as combating terrorism and sharing water sources, which can generate bilateral or multilateral cooperation.

Regional cooperation could also be fostered through joint peaceful nuclear and biochemical projects. One way of overcoming sensitive nuclear enrichment and fuel reprocessing issues would be to establish multilaterally owned and operated facilities. Jordan and Turkey maybe good candidates to host such facilities, as Jordan has recently discovered uranium reserves and Turkey has expressed its interest in hosting a regional fuel production centre¹¹.

This would have two major benefits. One, in the presence of multinational management and staff, it would be harder for states to divert uranium for nuclear weapons research programmes; and two, the region would need fewer facilities than if each country built its own production centres to cover domestic demand, and fewer facilities makes oversight easier¹². On the other hand, having international staff also means that more people will have access to nuclear know-how, creating a proliferation risk. However, this concern could be addressed by setting up a 'black box' arrangement at the facility so the technology cannot be accessed.

Cooperating on energy matters can be as simple as creating grid connections between states in the region. For example, Israel is not connected to the grids of any of its neighbours and hence is an 'energy island', in other words, it has source all energy through imports¹³. Creating grid connections between countries and establishing trade in surplus energy could pave the way for cooperation on nuclear energy matters and may even lessen the need for establishing new nuclear facilities.

⁸ J. A. Russell, Saudi Arabia in the 21st Century. A New Security Dilemma, in: Middle East Policy, Vol. 12 No. 3 (2005), pp. 64-78.

⁹ M. Kraig, Forging a New Security Order for the Persian Gulf, in: Middle East Policy, Vol. 13 No. 1, (2006), pp. 84-101.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ T. Lorenz & J. Kidd, Israel and Multilateral Nuclear Approaches in the Middle East, in: Arms Control Today, (October 2010).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

States can also cooperate on educating one another on the defensive side of nuclear, chemical and biological technologies, i.e. on safety and security protocols. Joint security drills and inspections can also be conducted as confidence-building measures. This is not only a blessing that Israel can offer to others; since most aforementioned states have at least had defensive chemical and biological weapons programmes, each side may have something to bring to the table in this area.

Some states are actually cooperating on nuclear matters today. The Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME) based in Jordan focuses on research in disciplines such as molecular environmental science, x-ray imaging and clinical medical applications, and participation is open to all scientists in Middle East. Its current members are Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Pakistan, Turkey, and the Palestinian Authority. SESAME offers a rare opportunity for Israeli and Palestinian scientists to work side by side¹⁴. Increasing participation and membership in these and other projects would be beneficial to all states in the region.

4. Role of the WMDFZ

The WMDFZ process is not expected to address all existing and future security dilemmas in the region. What it is expected to do, however, is to make these sources of insecurity more apparent for all sides. Recognition of the dynamics of security dilemmas may in itself help alleviate the dilemmas themselves¹⁵.

It has been suggested that for Israel, the value of possessing nuclear weapons might be declining after seeing the uselessness of such weapons against the actual security threats to Israel: Hezbollah, Hamas or the intifada¹⁶. While Israel is unlikely to sign the NPT in the short run, as suggested by Avner Cohen, the country might sign a separate document, perhaps with India and Pakistan, which would at least inhibit further development of their nuclear programmes and set a timeline for phasing out fissile material production¹⁷. Such an agreement or its variations could prove to be an excellent starting point for building up a WMDFZ.

A final issue to address is how the overall process should be managed. Two major approaches stand out against the linear ‘road map’ approach, which consists of sequential steps to be undertaken by the parties¹⁸: the ‘framework’ approach and the ‘basket’ approach.

The framework approach would have similar steps to the road map approach, for example CBMs might also come first in the framework approach, but these steps would be in the context of a wider set of goals¹⁹. It would therefore be less linear, more flexible and have various routes for progress.

The basket approach resembles the 1972-1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe that led to the Conventional Forces in Europe agreement. It consisted of three

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ A. Fliebert, *After Saddam. Regional Insecurity, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Proliferation Pressures in Postwar Iraq*, in: *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 118 No. 4 (2003/2004), pp. 547-567.

¹⁶ R. Johnson, *Rethinking Security Interests for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone in the Middle East*, in: *Disarmament Diplomacy*, Autumn No. 86, (2007).

¹⁷ T. Lorenz & J. Kidd, *Israel and Multilateral Nuclear Approaches in the Middle East*, in: *Arms Control Today*, (October 2010).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

'baskets' for cooperation, which later became the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) three dimensions, namely the politico-military dimension, the economic and environmental dimension, and the human dimension²⁰. A similar approach could be applied to the WMDFZ process in Middle East; since the baskets are separate from one another, the lack of progress in one does not impede progress in other baskets, whereas progress in one basket also contributes to the other baskets as it contributes to dialogue, trust and hence cooperation. Johnson proposes three main baskets; the first would focus on guiding principles and humanitarian issues, the second on WMD and achieving a WMDFZ, and the third on economic, scientific and environmental cooperation.²¹ While the contents might change depending on the needs of the parties, the approach might be very valuable in a mistrust-ridden region, as the success of its precedent shows.

5. Parallelism versus Sequentialism

Rather than seeing the road towards regional peace and WMD disarmament as mutually exclusive, or as a matter of what order to do things in, the two can be seen as mutually reinforcing and can be undertaken simultaneously. For example, initially Israel could sign an agreement on no first use of WMD (with or without disclosing its arsenal) and in return, other states can sign bilateral or multilateral agreements of non-aggression with Israel. Insisting on which issue should take precedence would be (and has been), in Johnson's words, 'a recipe for doing nothing'²².

The same is true for the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Rather than engaging in constructive dialogue, let alone taking solid steps, most parties have actually done nothing more than blame one another. Neither side is comfortable with the stalemate – every opportunity has been wasted, every show of goodwill has gone unrealized, and every genuine effort for establishing lasting peace has been squandered for the last 64 years. Rather than linking the solution to every problem to the Palestinian issue, the Arab states and Iran should realize that the issue can be resolved only by moving forward in other areas. This does not, of course, mean that Israel should be able to get away with what it can in the meantime; among other issues, the illegal construction of settlements should be prevented. What is meant here is that states should be conducting these processes parallel to one another, where the achievements in one would reinforce and enable achievements in others, but obstacles in one would not complicate, at least in most cases, other processes.

6. Isolation versus Engagement

States should also be giving serious consideration to the question of how to win certain parties over. It is almost certain that Tehran cannot be won over with the strategy that the US and Israel have been pursuing for several years. The problem here is not *why* coercive diplomacy is employed –coercive diplomacy has had its uses in the past – it is *how* it is employed. While it is in itself very doubtful whether success can be achieved through

²⁰ OSCE, The three OSCE dimensions, (2012), <http://www.osce.org/item/44318>, (Retrieved May 6, 2012).

²¹ For a detailed list of the contents of Johnson's proposed baskets, please see R. Johnson, Rethinking Security Interests for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone in the Middle East, in: Disarmament Diplomacy, Autumn No. 86, (2007).

²² Ibid.

economic sanctions, adding the threat of regime change²³ and even the threat of use of force as negotiating points is very likely to be a recipe for ineffective diplomacy. It is more likely that a medium-sized state with regional aspirations will dig in and harden its position and determination rather than caving in to such threats. While they are threatened by Iran's nuclear programme as well, Arab states understand Iran's rationale for pursuing such a programme better than the US and regard Washington's policy to be 'naive and counterproductive, as it plays into the ambitions of hard-liners and undermines moderates who seek to remain within the non-proliferation regime'.²⁴ Arab states are also worried that American, Israeli or British airstrikes against Iran's nuclear facilities would cause irreparable damage to the process, and would also cause massive protests in the region, especially in the Arab states – protests that the Arab states would want to avoid especially in such turbulent times. If the US and Israel insist on actually hitting Iran with 'sticks', it would be preferable for them to employ more covert methods such as the Stuxnet computer worm²⁵.

The same is true for the method that Arab states employ against Israel. Cornering and isolating already isolated and insecure states further is not the answer. It is true that Israel has been a free-rider to the NPT regime; it stayed outside the regime and developed its nuclear programme without any restrictions, but benefited from the limitations that the regime put on other states in the region²⁶—and this should change. Yet Arab states are unlikely to make headway with their 'Israel bashing' – done mostly in the form of introducing various resolutions against Israel's nuclear programme in different fora²⁷. One recent resolution is the Israel Nuclear Capabilities Resolution adopted in 2009 in the IAEA General Conference. The resolution criticizes Israel's nuclear programme and calls upon Israel to accede to the NPT and comply with IAEA safeguards. The resolution has been an object of contention between the two camps since 2006, when Arab states became frustrated with the lack of progress on the NWFZ in the region. Luckily for the 2012 conference, Arab states decided not to introduce the resolution at the General Conference in 2011, in part because it would negatively affect the 2012 conference²⁸.

7. The Role of Outside Actors

The role of outside actors in furthering an improved security environment in the region should also be underlined. One important step would be to tighten controls on the transfer of unconventional military technology and assets to the region. The most certain way of achieving this is targeting the suppliers; American and European laws must be made stiffer; Russia, China, India, Pakistan and others should be pressured, and intelligence assets of both external and regional actors should be mustered in order to monitor illicit transactions²⁹. In

²³ B. Jentleson, *Coercive Diplomacy. Scope and Limits in the Contemporary World*, in: *The Stanley Foundation Policy Analysis Brief*, (December 2006).

²⁴ Johnson, (2007), p.6

²⁵ Y. Katz, *Stuxnet virus set back Iran's nuclear program by 2 years*, in: *The Jerusalem Post*, (December 15, 2010), <http://www.jpost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?id=199475>, (Retrieved May 1, 2012).

²⁶ R. Johnson, *Rethinking Security Interests for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone in the Middle East*, in: *Disarmament Diplomacy*, Autumn No. 86, (2007).

²⁷ Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, *Fact Sheet #2. Information Relevant to the IAEA General Conference, Topic: Middle East Issues*, Vienna: James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, (2011).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ P. W. Rodman, *Middle East Diplomacy after the Gulf War*, in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70 No. 2, (1991), pp. 1-18.

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fact, the co-sponsor states can take the initiative of freezing their transfers of unconventional military technology to the region indefinitely to show their commitment and to convince other suppliers.

It would be logical to assign a Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General to oversee and aid the entire process. This proposal was brought forward by Egypt, Russia and several other key countries at the 2009 NPT Preparation Committee³⁰. The representative would primarily act in a similar capacity to the facilitator of the 2012 Conference, but on a broader scope and on a permanent basis, and might be given additional powers and responsibilities if the parties deem them necessary.

8. Turkey and the WMDFZ

Finally, a few words on Turkey and the WMDFZ. When Egypt and other Arab countries began to champion the idea of a Middle East free of nuclear weapons in the early 1960s, Ankara did not want to associate itself with the initiative. There were three fundamental reasons for this early stance. The first one was that as a NATO member, Ankara could not really be part of an endeavour led by a member of the Non-Aligned Movement which could have serious implications for the security order in the region. Secondly, as a NATO member host to a range of US forward deployed nuclear weapons, Ankara's position was even more ambiguous. And finally, the security relationship and intense collaboration with the US and gradually with Israel prevented Ankara from being part of a campaign seemingly designed to bring pressure on Israel regarding its nuclear deterrent. On the contrary, until very recently, Turkey viewed Israel as its security partner in the region and thus had no reason to participate in a movement that would alienate it from this important regional ally.

Today the considerations that affect Ankara's perspective on a Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (MENWFZ) have changed considerably, starting with the relationship with Israel. The second factor which has led to the overhaul in Ankara's thinking has been the deteriorating regional security situation resulting from the wave of Arab reforms across the region. These changes have had a radical impact on Turkey's outlook on regional disarmament and the WMDFZ.

The deteriorating regional security situation has alerted Turkish authorities to the implications of a potential conflict with neighbours with WMD capabilities. As a result, Turkey's interest in the WMDFZ has been rekindled. In other words, Turkey's interest in the WMDFZ process is now more substantive and goes beyond the tactical objective of criticizing Israel. A clear example of this transformation in the country's foreign policy vision was given in President Abdullah Gül's speech given on the occasion of the opening session of the Turkish Parliament on 1 October 2012, in which he clearly referred to the WMDFZ process and reiterated Turkey's willingness to bring a new dynamic to the process. In parallel, Turkey also espoused a leadership role within the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, an ad hoc group established by ten Non-Nuclear Weapons States in the wake of the 2010 NPT Review Conference with a view to advance the action plans agreed at said Conference.

³⁰ Monterey Nonproliferation Strategy Group. Nuclear Weapon Free Zones and the Middle East. Monterey: James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, (2009).

9. Key Recommendations

Amid the ongoing wave of change in the region, the conference will be the first official regional gathering to include newly formed governments subsequent to the Arab Spring. In the words of Maged Abdelaziz, Egypt's UN ambassador, the conference will hopefully be 'a good opportunity for Israel to start getting rid of its nuclear weapons, and for Iran not to get nuclear weapons, and for the Arabs to join the chemical and biological conventions'.³¹ For a smoother WMDFZ process, several guiding principles need to be identified and will hopefully be agreed upon at the 2012 conference.

1. Pursue confidence-building measures in all steps of the process to address the chronic insecurity endemic to the region.
2. Prevent the singling out of states; break the isolation of Israel, Iran and others; and stimulate dialogue by using existing or establishing new regional organizations.
3. Protect the right of all states to pursue nuclear and other research for civilian purposes, promote cooperation on the civilian use of nuclear energy and defensive biochemical technologies.
4. Avoid linking the WMDFZ process with the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict.
5. Encourage a wide range of unilateral, bilateral or multilateral de-proliferation efforts; create enough room for states to pursue parallel processes that would complement the spirit of the WMDFZ in the Middle East.
6. Promote the establishment of regional verification and monitoring tools and institutions in addition to the NPT and the IAEA.
7. Include all states in the region in the discussions and allow a flexible schedule for joining the regime, similar to the example of the Tlatelolco Treaty.
8. Seek full compliance of WMD-possessing and WMD technology supplier states; involve them in the process in order to address regional insecurities originating from their capacities; and stop the transfer of nonconventional military assets to the region.
9. Synchronize policies of co-sponsor states in order to balance carrots and sticks against any existing or future proliferator.
10. Appoint a UN representative tasked with overseeing the process and making sure that the parties abide by the guiding principles.

³¹ <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/middle-east-unrest-could-harm-wmd-free-zone-talks/>