

## Promoting arms control and regional security in the Middle East

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It has been over five years since the Middle East working group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) held a formal activity. ACRS, one of five multilateral working groups launched in January 1992 to support the Middle East Peace Process that began three months earlier in Madrid, focuses exclusively on military stability and security enhancement in the region as a whole.<sup>1</sup> This region-wide approach, sponsored jointly by the United States and the Russian Federation, was unprecedented for the Middle East. It was generally welcomed as a means for creating a political framework promoting security dialogue and co-operation, as well as reducing suspicions and misunderstandings, between Arabs and Israelis. So what has happened to ACRS since 1995, what became of the security and confidence-building measures (CBMs) the working group adopted, and what has filled the vacuum created by its absence?

From the beginning, no one expected the working group to take vast strides forward without significant progress in the 'core' peace talks directly between Israel and its immediate Arab neighbours, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians. After all, ACRS, like the other multilateral working groups, was set up to complement and support the bilateral talks, and not become a substitute for those bilateral negotiations. When progress slowed in the bilaterals in mid-1996 the pace of work in the multilateral working groups retarded and in some cases either halted altogether or resumed informally when the peace process advanced.

Formal ACRS activities, however, ceased in September 1995 at a time when the bilaterals were still blossoming and the other multilateral working groups were in full swing. ACRS was suspended over an internal dispute about how to proceed on the agenda of the working group in the absence of a comprehensive peace. It was a dispute that was four years in the making. At the first ACRS plenary in May 1992 in Washington, DC, the parties agreed that the working group should follow a limited set of guidelines that included operating by consensus, seeking an ambitious set of goals, dealing with the comprehensive list of concerns impacting on their security, and participation in agreed measures will be voluntary. The primacy of the bilateral talks reinforced the notion that the working group should proceed step-by-step, starting modestly and proceeding to more substantial measures as political conditions permit. According to this approach, after the parties become familiar with one another, conversant on arms control measures and establish a record of trust and compliance on the softer measures, then the ground would become fertile for confronting the more difficult elements related to arms control, disarmament and regional stability. As such, the group initially and successfully concentrated on a series of limited CBMs, refinement of declaratory positions, developing

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expertise in arms control, and establishing a structure to expedite the work of ACRS. However, this approach unwittingly sowed the seeds for the political context that would lead to the impasse in ACRS.

By December 1994, there was growing pressure within the working group to go beyond political confidence and security-building measures by also pursuing structural arms control. While CBMs were judged to be important to efforts to reduce tensions and prevent war by misunderstanding, miscalculation or surprise attack, structural arms control was viewed as necessary for scaling-down the forces of states to conduct military operations by limiting manpower, weapons, military equipment and deployments. The issue of central importance to most Arab parties was the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the region, and particularly steps to control the proliferation of nuclear weapons. All ACRS parties agreed on the need to address this issue and, indeed, all supported establishing such a zone in principle. But there were divisions about whether the political conditions were ripe for approaching arms control of conventional and non-conventional weapons at that time and the need for joining global arms control treaties as a prerequisite for establishing a Middle Eastern WMD-free zone. Without an agreed agenda, a consensus for continuing the working group could not be obtained.

Several attempts have been made to resurrect ACRS. Most recently, in February 2000, after increased activity on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Palestinian tracks, the Foreign Ministers of the Multilateral Track Steering Group met in Moscow to reinvigorate the working groups. This was the first Steering Group meeting since 1995. Plenary dates and venues were selected for the water, environment, refugees and economic development working groups. Parties also noted the importance of reaching an agreed comprehensive agenda for ACRS in order to get that working group underway again. But when momentum on the bilateral talks slowed a couple of months later, interest in rejuvenating the multilaterals also receded.

While regional governments have not been able to bridge the gap that separates them on the ACRS agenda to permit resumption of formal talks, there has been growing interest by individuals from the regional parties to meet and discuss regional security affairs. Stepping into the void created by the suspension of ACRS, a host of extra-regional governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have sponsored and organized nearly eighty workshops, courses, seminars and other events on Middle East security since 1995. This robust set of non-binding, unofficial activities is described collectively as 'ACRS Track Two diplomacy'.

Track Two activities are likely to remain the central locus for region-wide discussions on Middle East security until a significant event (e.g., a breakthrough in the bilateral peace process, a regional war,

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a serious shift in the military balance, an open WMD arms race, etc.) engenders the regional parties to sit down again in formal 'Track One' negotiations. In the interim, Track Two is making an important contribution by laying the groundwork for resuming those official deliberations. Some activities have even made advancements on the same measures pursued in ACRS. But informal activities, by their very nature, cannot produce binding arms control and confidence-building

agreements. The bottom line is that comprehensive security in the Middle East will not be greatly advanced without a formal process for negotiating the complex issues related to regional stability and arms control.

### *Where ACRS left off in 1995*

The history and structure of ACRS have been described and assessed amply elsewhere, and, consequently, shall not be reviewed here.<sup>2</sup> Instead, I will briefly recall the successes and shortcomings

of ACRS which may have a bearing on resumed ACRS working group activities, topics for discussion in Track Two fora on Middle East regional security, or the erection of a new regime of regional security negotiations when circumstances permit.

ACRS revealed that most regional parties wanted to meet together to not only discuss their various views on security problems and the ingredients for building a stable and effective regional security architecture, but also to negotiate certain multilateral arms control and CBMs helpful to the establishment of such a regime. Within the span of forty-five months, officials from fifteen regional parties (i.e., Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen), together with representatives from a score of extra-regional states and the United Nations, met in six plenary sessions and thirty-one expert-level meetings. This unprecedented and intense schedule of meetings conveyed the seriousness and trenchant interest in advancing co-operative regional security in the Middle East. It also demonstrated a deep commitment to the peace process and a desire to address one another directly on issues of mutual concern even without normalized relations throughout the region. Although most of these meetings were convened in Canada, Europe, the Russian Federation and the United States, the parties evinced their growing sense of propriety of the issues by hosting meetings in Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and Tunisia during ACRS's final year. The parties were also volunteering to host certain newly created institutions to support the process. Regional hosting and institutionalization were significant achievements not only within the ACRS working group but also within the context of the overall peace process.

In addition to developing a structure for multilateral negotiations, ACRS made good progress in several areas of concern. In many ways, ACRS set new records relative to regional security talks in other parts of the world in terms of quickly negotiating and adopting transparency agreements to improve trust and reduce tensions. To be fair, Middle East parties modelled their efforts largely after security arrangements within Europe and agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union, but adapting these measures to suit their own needs. After reviewing the long list of agreements pioneered by others, Middle East parties elected to devote their energies initially to the following initiatives.

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#### COMMUNICATIONS

The parties agreed to establish a communications network for conveying important information related to the ACRS process and implementing agreed measures. This 'warm line' was considered to be a first step towards creating a 'hot line' among parties for crisis management. The network became operational in March 1995 by temporarily using a portion of the communications network hub of the Organization on Security and Co-operation in Europe to get the network off the ground. End-user stations were set up in several capitals, operators partook in orientation classes, and operational guidelines and procedures were adopted. Parties also discussed configuring the network for rapid communications in support of search and rescue co-operation. Additionally, efforts were being directed to develop a databank for uniform storage of information related to ACRS. The parties also agreed to establish a permanent communications network hub in Cairo and requests for technical proposals to establish this hub were received from several private communications vendors. ACRS ended before the network reached a significant quorum of participants and the new hub could be established. The interim network formally ceased operations when the infrastructure and end-user stations became technically obsolete in 1999.

### MILITARY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Parties negotiated and adopted an agreement on pre-notification of certain military activities. This confidence-building measure included procedures for notifying other regional parties about certain military events such as the movement of at least 4,000 troops and 110 tanks. Parties also agreed on some types of non-sensitive military information that would be exchanged initially and the format for conveying this information. The agreements were never implemented.

### MARITIME CBMs

Regional parties adopted an agreement on 'Guidelines for Operating Procedures for Maritime Cooperation and Conduct in the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the Sea in the Middle East' (INCSEA). Regional parties also concluded text for a 'Framework for Maritime Search and Rescue' (SAR). Subsequently, the parties observed INCSEA and SAR demonstrations in the Mediterranean off the coast of Italy. ACRS also held a symposium that brought together senior maritime officers from throughout the Middle East for the first time. Implementation of the agreements ceased when ACRS went into abeyance.

### DECLARATORY CBMs

ACRS parties negotiated a declaration laying out the fundamental principles governing security relations among regional participants, guidelines for the negotiation process, and five objectives to be pursued within the working group in order to advance regional security. All but one paragraph (dealing with the establishment of a WMD-free zone) of the five-page 'Statement on Arms Control and Regional Security' were agreed when ACRS ended.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the ACRS statement, six ACRS parties submitted national statements on their long-term security concerns and objectives.<sup>4</sup> Based on these papers, the cosponsors drafted a paper identifying areas of commonality and differences in perspectives of the regional parties. Such an exercise was helpful to discussions within the working group, but more parties needed to submit their national statements.

### REGIONAL SECURITY CENTRE

Parties agreed in principle to establish a regional security centre in Amman with associated centres in Tunis and Doha. A draft mandate covering objectives, structure, operations, immediate goals and division of labour between the centres was negotiated among experts and nearly ready for working group adoption when ACRS went into abeyance. Regional parties were more comfortable with the idea of initially establishing a centre for regional dialogue rather than a crisis prevention centre that would seek to resolve disputes.

## TRANSPARENCY MEASURES

Regional parties were very interested in efforts to improve transparency between each other, and in this sense provide greater predictability. Parties made field visits to a Multilateral Force and Observers site in the Sinai, an air base in the United Kingdom and a NATO exercise in Denmark in order to see how such visits and observations are conducted. The working group did not advance to the point of negotiating regular site visits.

## VERIFICATION MEASURES

In July 1993, regional parties attended a workshop in Cairo focusing extensively on verification techniques associated with a variety of arms control agreements, CBMs, and preventing the proliferation of WMD. Subsequently, the parties toured an Open Skies aircraft, visited a nuclear power plant in Germany to learn how a regional verification authority (EURATOM) interacts with a global verification authority (IAEA), observed a Chemical Weapons Convention inspectors' training course in Finland, reviewed techniques employed by a Finnish institute for monitoring for the absence of nuclear testing, and toured a Chemical Weapons Convention verification laboratory in Switzerland.

## OTHER ISSUES

The working group also held discussions on various conceptual issues such as the elements necessary for beginning arms control negotiations, definitions of weapon categories, force structure, delineation of the region for arms control purposes, guidelines for new parties to join the working group, threat perceptions, benefits and limits on the use of outer space, managed access and co-operative monitoring, and military doctrines. By December 1994, the group began generating ideas for a second generation of CBMs and co-operative activities, as well as new subjects for discussion. Parties expressed interest in topics such as non-military security threats, combating terrorism, co-operative civil defence, reciprocal port calls, instructor and student exchanges between general staff colleges, weapon-free zone arrangements in other regions, arms control training courses, maritime medicine, demining, military code of conduct, co-operative prosthetic medicine for victims of landmines, peaceful nuclear co-operation, feasibility of limitations on defence expenditures, joint hazard relief co-operation, registries on military manpower, unit holdings, arms acquisitions and defence expenditures, principles governing conventional arms transfers, consultations about unusual military activities, non-offensive defence doctrines, and seismic monitoring. ACRS was also beginning to grapple with defining issues that were more germane to sub-regional contexts of the Levant, the Gulf and the Maghreb than to the overall Arab-Israeli conflict.

This compendium of activities is not meant to paint a Pollyannaish picture of a largely defunct process or to gloss over fundamental political problems and tensions within the working group. Rather, the history of the ACRS process and the set of agreements the working group adopted in such a short span of time adduce that some forms of multilateral security co-operation can be achieved in the right political context. At the same time, the process in the Middle East may be so fragile and full of endemic conflicts due to deep-seated mistrust and

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long-standing regional rivalries that substantive arms control negotiation may have to wait until there is significant progress in the bilateral peace talks or a comprehensive peace is achieved.

### *ACRS limitations: implications for Track One and Track Two*

Always brewing beneath ACRS's surface were certain structural and substantive limitations that straightjacketed the process. These limitations should be reviewed when developing an agreeable and workable format for formal negotiations. Likewise, it is important to see if Track Two activities can redress some of the formal track's limitations.

Foremost among the limitations, ACRS and the other multilateral working groups were at all times *subordinated to the bilateral peace process*, not a replacement for those core talks. As long as progress was being made in the bilateral talks, then there was general support for letting the multilateral groups continue. Some multilateral participants argued that the working groups should be more independent of Track One to ensure continuity in the peace process should the bilateral talks stall. But when the bilateral talks began to experience a series of setbacks in mid-1996, interest in continuing with the multilaterals waned. In the end, the multilaterals, which were intended, *inter alia*, to give 'non-core' Arab states to the Israeli-Arab conflict (outside the Levant) an active role in the peace process, became a weather vane for measuring support throughout the region for the bilateral negotiations.

A second limitation concerns the *level of participation*. Syria and Lebanon declined to join any multilateral working groups without a breakthrough in bilateral negotiations with Israel and Iran, Iraq and Libya were not invited to join. Each of these states has a bearing on factors related to regional security because of their composition of significant military holdings, pursuit of WMD, support for terrorism or unclear military intentions. Without the involvement of these parties, the working group could neither truly address the full range of security concerns nor conduct comprehensive arms control negotiations throughout the region. The decision to move ahead with ACRS anyway reflected the realistic notion that the working group had to start with the willing and hope that the political climate would change so that others would eventually participate in a productive manner. But this meant that at some point the group could not advance without taking into account the impact of the outside regional states and the need for their co-operation in order to establish a comprehensive regional security regime.

A related limitation of ACRS was that the working group remained *the sole providence of senior government officials* and did not try to build a regional constituency for regional security co-operation. Most of work and achievements of ACRS are not well known and remain outside public scrutiny except for a few official publications and articles by former delegates to the proceedings.<sup>5</sup> ACRS activities did not involve academics or a new generation of experts. It was a top-down approach to regional security, which left many outside the ACRS working group longing for involvement and information on regional security and arms control. Some ACRS participants had become acutely aware of this shortcoming and wanted the working group to address the topic of public diplomacy.

A fourth limitation concerns the working group's *inability to obtain a meaningful consensus* on the scope, sequencing and magnitude of arms control agreements to be pursued in order to mitigate security threat perceptions. While there was a lot of discussion on these issues, ACRS could not develop agreed practical steps to reduce concerns about military capabilities, strategic doctrines and political intentions. ACRS was only beginning to break down the walls of misunderstandings between the parties about each other's long-term security concerns and the reasons for the asymmetries between each state's force structure. But ACRS stopped before obtaining the confidence

and transparency necessary for tackling the hard and sensitive issues. In general, the parties continue to think of their security in terms of zero-sum gains and losses, rather than in terms of co-operation and non-hostile competition in which everyone's security is enhanced.

A fifth limitation is the relative *lack of expertise on arms control and CBMs*. At the outset of ACRS, no regional party had a government office devoted strictly to arms control. Generally, the bureaucracies' orientation to regional security was left to the province of the military and diplomats assigned to international organizations. Only a few skilled regional bureaucrats and academics had even studied the history and concepts of arms control and were conversant about the panoply of CBMs and arms limitations agreements. As a consequence, Middle Easterners became reliant on the expertise of outsiders and ACRS, particularly in the beginning, often resembled an academic study group. But by 1995, a regional cadre of experts in security and arms control was beginning to emerge and some parties had set up offices to focus on arms control. This cadre of officials has now virtually disappeared in most regional states.

A sixth limitation relates to *structural asymmetries and the general lack of understanding* about the complexities related to arms control remedies for reducing the deleterious effects of these asymmetries. Strategic asymmetries between Middle East states are vast and not easily bridgeable. They go beyond simple military balances on force structure and holdings or 'bean counts'. There are asymmetries in geography, culture, military training and doctrine, demographics, modernization and economics. In such a situation, arms control agreements limited to a single weapons category are not likely to work. Parties will need to address a general force reduction, including both conventional and non-conventional weapons, at the same time. Adoption of international means of verification is likely to be viewed as insufficient and must be augmented by mutually acceptable regional structures. Hence, when ACRS resumes the working group will face some very tough discussions and protracted negotiations.

### *Track Two: filling the void?*

Despite ACRS's continuing dormancy, interest in the subject of arms control and multilateral security co-operation by regional parties remains active and vibrant. In response to this interest over thirty Track Two projects have been initiated since 1995. The projects are oriented toward promoting comprehensive regional security as distinct from Track Two projects that focus narrowly on bilateral or trilateral relations in the Middle East. Collectively, these ACRS-related activities have brought together over 750 regional and extra-regional officials, military officers, security experts and other specialists for off-the-record discussions and limited co-operation on various issues related to regional arms control and security. Over 200 of these participants are from the military, forty of whom are general officer grade. Another 150 participants are from the diplomatic and civilian governmental community. Including workshops organized by NGOs between 1991 and 1995, over 100 Track Two events have been organized, averaging one activity per month.

It would be wrong to view Track Two as a continuation of or substitution for the ACRS working group. First, Track Two activities have been around for a long time and some precede Track One. What has changed significantly since ACRS was suspended is the focus of Track Two. Most Track Two projects that took place prior to September 1995 occurred during the period of 1991–1993 and concentrated on encouraging and initiating a formal regional security negotiation process. When ACRS negotiations took off like a jackrabbit after 1992, most Track Two projects were left in the dust and their organizers saw little value they could add to the formal process. Only a few projects convened between 1993 and 1995. Conversely, projects initiated after 1995 were organized mainly to keep the

parties engaged in regional security and arms control discussions and activities in the absence of a formal negotiation process.

Second, Track Two does not have official blessings to negotiate even non-binding agreements and lacks the co-ordination and uniform framework associated with a formal process. Governments generally

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do not draft the agendas for meetings, although many projects work with government officials in organizing workshops and seek suggestions from officials on workshop proceedings and participation. Most ACRS-related Track Two activities focus on long-term issues that are only approachable on a practical level when formal negotiations resume or when there is a comprehensive peace. Indeed, perhaps one reason regional parties, especially officials, feel comfortable participating in Track Two activities is because these activities are powerless to change the immediate situation. Otherwise, Track Two might be doomed to the same fate as ACRS.

Officials who participate in ACRS-related Track Two meetings do so 'in their private capacities'. In this sense, Track Two offers additional opportunities for officials to discuss issues of concern directly with their counterparts either in the workshop or on the margins, without necessarily representing their governments (although most officials are acutely aware of their sensitive positions in the public format) and making commitments. It also offers them opportunities to conduct in-depth analysis of regional security issues. To help foster open discussion, most Track Two activities follow two common ground rules: discussions are off the record and participants are asked not to report on the meeting's proceedings and participants to the press. Consequently, ACRS-related Track Two activities are not well publicized.

It should be recognized that each Track Two project has its own set of defined objectives and themes that it pursues. But most organizers of current projects want to obtain results that can be of assistance to ACRS. Some projects seek to move beyond the sensitive areas that restricted ACRS activities — for example, by directly addressing the WMD issue. In general, Track Two projects seek to achieve one or more of the following twelve goals:

- Keep regional parties, especially ACRS officials or officials who may become engaged in a resurrected ACRS, engaged in direct dialogue about arms control and regional security with the aim of reducing misunderstandings and misperceptions;
- Expand the cadre of experts on arms control and CBMs in regional foreign and defence ministries;
- Promote contacts and dialogue on security issues between a new generation of Middle East security experts and educators;
- Explore new ideas, second generation CBMs, improved proceeding formats, and long-term objectives that could be pursued in a resumed ACRS or in a new regional security forum;
- Conduct in-depth analysis on complex issues relevant to ACRS;
- Develop proposals that can resolve the impasse in ACRS negotiations;
- Increase Middle East civil society involvement in regional security diplomacy by broadening the constituency for regional security co-operation and arms control and civil society's access to information about these issues;
- Consider alternative frameworks and structures to ACRS for regional security negotiations;
- Promote concrete co-operative projects and data exchange in scientific areas related to arms control and regional security;
- Develop training tools for teaching about arms control to Middle East representatives;

- Reach out to individuals from regional states outside ACRS (e.g., Syria, Lebanon, Iran) for involvement in Track Two activities; and
- Limit revisionism of ACRS history that could cloud the future work of ACRS.

### *Track Two regional security and arms control activities*

The diversity of Middle East security Track Two activities defies easy classification. For this article, the projects are grouped into seven functional categories in order to make an assessment about the contributions of Track Two generally.

#### SECURITY DIALOGUE WORKSHOPS

The most common Track Two projects are single workshops dedicated to engaging Arabs and Israelis in a general dialogue about the peace negotiations and regional security. Single workshops organized by universities generally have very limited objectives and are often tied to an academic agenda. Some of the more notable workshops were collaborations between NGOs from inside and outside the region as these involved a significant number of participants from the Middle East.

Numerous organizations have hosted security-related workshops, including the American Academy for the Advancement of Science, Brookings Institution, Burkle Center for International Relations at the University of California at Los Angeles, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Center for Foreign Policy Studies at Dalhousie University, Center for International Security Studies at Maryland, Center for Research and Consultancy in Oman, Center for Research in Arms Control and Security in Jordan, Center for Strategic Studies in Morocco, Cooperative Monitoring Center at Sandia National Laboratories, Department of Disarmament and Security Studies in Jordan, DePaul University, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies in the United Arab Emirates, Geneva Center for Security Policy, Georgia Tech University, Gulf/2000 Project, Henry L. Stimson Center, Institute for National Security Studies at the United States National Defense University, Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, Institute for Science and International Security, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies in Israel, Lester B. Pearson Canadian International Peacekeeping Training Centre, Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies in Malta, Middle East Institute, Monash University in Australia, Monterey Institute of International Studies, Munk Centre for International Relations at University of Toronto, National Center for Middle East Studies in Egypt, Norwegian Institute on International Affairs, Programme for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation, Pugwash, Rand Corporation, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Science Applications International Corporation, Search for Common Ground, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik in Germany, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, United States Air Force Counterproliferation Center, United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, United States Institute of Peace, University of California at Berkeley, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and Wilton Park Conference Centre in the United Kingdom. Most of the workshops hosted by these organizations occurred during the period of 1991–1995, comprised single workshops, and rarely produced a tangible output such as a study or publication.

Since 1995, the most common format for Track Two projects has been serial meetings; that is, projects organized around several meetings that generally keep the same group of individuals engaged in structured dialogue or until the project's goals have been achieved. Serial projects benefit from

maintaining a core group of individuals who become familiar with the perspectives and needs of their counterparts, somewhat resembling the format of official talks. Unlike most of the single workshops,

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serial projects generally have access to the official policy-making community. Experience also shows that serial meetings are productive venues for drafting studies and papers that can be disseminated to regional officials for consideration. Among the serial projects in this category, the following are noteworthy for their findings and ability to attract participation by a significant number of officials and

representatives from throughout the region, including from non-ACRS states.

- Burkle Center for International Relations at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) has organized since 1995 a series of large annual conferences on various themes related to regional security, such as establishing a WMD-free zone and lessons learned from the Asia-Pacific security regime. This project tends to attract the greatest number of regional officials to its series of conferences, which have been hosted in Cyprus, Sweden, Norway, United Kingdom, Australia and Oman with local NGOs. Between 1992 and 1995, UCLA also helped organize large conferences in California, Greece and Jordan. The UCLA series has produced a pamphlet describing over 300 ideas for improving regional security relations and the ACRS process, including concrete CBMs. It is also publishing a collection of papers by regional experts that were presented in the conferences.
- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) organized a series of four workshops on establishing a co-operative regional security regime in the Middle East. The group researched lessons from other regional security regimes that might be applicable to the Middle East. The SIRPI report from these workshops reflects the general understandings of regional participants from most ACRS parties, Lebanon and Iran about the issues involved in setting up such a regime. The report was produced in English, Arabic and Farsi.
- The National Center for Middle East Studies (NCMES) in Egypt and UCLA jointly host three to four workshops yearly that bring together thirty regional and extra-regional officials and security experts. The group focuses on various agreed topics related to regional security and has created a loose association of strategic studies institutes in the region.
- Search for Common Ground sponsors several working groups that mirror the multilateral tracks. The Security Working Group has published an important collection of papers in English and Arabic about threat perceptions by representatives from Egypt, Syria, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Palestinian Authority and Turkey. The organization has also sponsored a workshop bringing together political editors to discuss the impact of news commentaries and political cartoons on public opinion about the peace process.
- Columbia University's Gulf/2000 Project focuses strictly on issues related to the Gulf states and provides a forum to discuss and exchange information. The project organizes workshops, an electronic library, research facility and a bulletin board on the Internet. It also maintains private and public web sites. Several studies have been commissioned to examine long-term trends affecting the future stability and security of the Gulf region.
- Wilton Park Conference Centre, associated with the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, organizes three Middle East-related conferences annually dealing with various aspects related to the peace process, Gulf security and relations between Europeans and the Maghreb, Islam and the West.

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## MILITARY-TO-MILITARY ORIENTED PROJECTS

Recognizing the importance of the military in regional security negotiations and their generally limited knowledge about arms control, three projects seek to engage military officers in discussions on these subjects. Like ACRS, some of the projects encourage exchanging non-sensitive information and conducting site visits to military installations. Some projects go beyond ACRS by bringing together for the first time senior military officers from throughout the region, including non-ACRS states. And one project has created a database of military holdings that could be valuable to beginning arms control and force reduction negotiations.

- **Senior Military-to-Military Dialogue:** The University of California's Institute on Global Cooperation and Conflict has organized a project entitled 'Arms Control and Security Improvement in the Middle East'. This ongoing series of workshops has achieved the unprecedented success of bringing together senior Arab and Israeli military officers responsible for strategic planning to exchange views and concerns about regional security issues and military doctrines. Over 100 active duty and retired senior officers, including many generals, from fifteen regional parties have participated in workshops held in Egypt, Jordan, Cyprus and the United States. Workshops have also included site visits to see de-mining activities in Jordan and the Green Line in Cyprus. The project has published research papers presented in the workshops including studies on the military balance in the region and maritime CBMs.
- **War College Military Fellows Conferences:** United States war colleges have begun organizing workshops on topics related to Middle East arms control and regional security in order to promote dialogue among the fellows from the Middle East on these topics.
- **Maritime workshops:** The Canadian Coast Guard College has conducted a series of maritime safety colloquia in which regional naval and civilian authorities from across the Middle East and North Africa discuss ways to enhance maritime safety and security, including on such diverse topics as vessel traffic services, coastal zone management, maritime distress and safety systems, and search and rescue. The Coast Guard is in the process of establishing a Maritime Safety Network to promote regular correspondence. The Canadians have also conducted courses on the peacekeeping dimension of maritime operations and hosted symposia for senior naval officers from throughout the world.

## SCIENTIST-TO-SCIENTIST ORIENTED PROJECTS

Scientific co-operation on arms control verification was one of the last items ACRS began to explore before its suspension. Track Two has provided an opportunity to continue that exploration and to conduct actual co-operative projects. In the process, it has broadened the constituency for regional security by bringing together a set of individuals (scientists) who were not involved in the formal negotiations.

- Working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United States Geological Survey and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory have helped spearhead a project promoting regional seismic monitoring co-operation. The project began in 1992 by focusing initially on earthquake hazards, and was entitled 'Reduction of Earthquake Losses in the Eastern Mediterranean Region'. In 1995, the project's objectives were broadened so that one of its principal goals, in addition to assisting parties in planning to minimize losses from

earthquakes, became the creation of a database of Middle East seismic events that will provide a baseline necessary for distinguishing between natural events such as earthquakes and man-made events such as nuclear weapons tests. Seismic experts from throughout the region meet two to three times annually for practical workshops dealing with seismic analysis, data exchange and archival, and conducting dedicated calibration experiments. Aside from its humanitarian objectives, the project may realize the first regional confidence-building measure dealing with WMD. Also, although the principal actors are scientists, the project sets a precedent for data exchange between states in the region. This is one of the few Track Two projects that have succeeded in fostering tangible regional co-operation, and, as such, some of the participants refer to the project as 'Seismology for Peace'.

- The Cooperative Monitoring Center (CMC) at Sandia National Laboratories has conducted a visiting scholars programme that has brought together select scholars from the region to conduct joint technical collaboration on verification issues relevant to Middle East security, such as border monitoring. The CMC also teamed up with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) to bring together technical experts from the region to discuss the role of commercial satellite imagery in the Middle East peace process and propose co-operative projects in this area.

#### RESEARCH STUDIES AND ACRS-RELATED PROPOSALS

Several Track Two projects have been organized to produce studies on specific topics relevant to advancing co-operative security and ACRS. Over eighteen studies have been published on a variety of topics, including the use of commercial satellite imagery for arms control, the future agenda of arms control in the Middle East, a zone free of WMD in the Middle East, national threat perceptions, establishing a co-operative regional security regime, maritime aspects of security improvement in the Middle East, a future security architecture for the Middle East, and sources on arms control and disarmament in the Middle East on the Internet.<sup>6</sup> These studies provide in-depth analysis on some of the topics originally raised in ACRS, suggest new co-operative activities and CBMs, or propose alternative regional security frameworks. Some of the studies result from direct collaboration between Arab and Israeli security experts and officials. In order to ensure that these studies are read widely, some Track Two projects distribute and review completed studies from other projects and use the studies as a means for generating discussion within workshops. Senior regional officials have been briefed on some of the findings from the studies. Collectively, these studies are important to both garnering support for regional security negotiations and the deliberations themselves. They provide valuable homework for Track One.

#### ARMS CONTROL EDUCATION

One of the primary functions being considered for the ACRS Regional Security Center was arms control training. Courses on arms control help expand regional expertise in this area and prepare regional parties for ongoing global arms control negotiations and resumed regional security talks.

*Arms control courses, regardless of whether they are organized by governments or NGOs, can have a direct bearing on formal proceedings.*

As noted earlier, one problem facing ACRS was the dearth of experts from the region on arms control matters. In this sense, arms control courses, regardless of whether they are organized by governments or NGOs, can have a direct bearing on formal proceedings. But this requires continuous

education. As with all skills, it is important to utilize what has been learned or else face losing those skills. And in the case of governments, individual diplomats are frequently changing positions so there is a continuous need to educate a new crop of experts. Several Track Two projects have provided arms control training:

- The former United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency,<sup>7</sup> the United States State Department and Sandia National Laboratories' Cooperative Monitoring Center have jointly organized a series of intensive two-week training courses on arms control and multilateral diplomacy for over fifty officials from Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Oman and Qatar.
- The Geneva Center for Security Policy, occasionally working with a Finnish institute, also has sponsored training courses for Middle East parties.
- The United States Defense Threat Reduction Agency has conducted short orientation programmes on arms control verification techniques, including tours of an Open Skies aircraft, for Middle East visitors to its headquarters and in Track Two workshops.

#### ARMS CONTROL TRAINING TOOLS

One problem that became evident in ACRS was the lack of a single set of authoritative reference materials on arms control in Arabic. Several organizations have been developing such reference tools as well as software that can be employed by regional parties to prepare for arms control negotiations. These tools have been developed in consultation with Middle East parties and have been demonstrated or utilized in several Track Two projects and training courses.

- Recognizing the growing need for a uniform set of arms control definitions, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research is currently completing a handbook, entitled *Coming to Terms with Security: A Lexicon for Arms Control, Disarmament and Confidence-Building*, that will provide a short history and comprehensive glossary of arms control terms and treaties in both English and Arabic. UNIDIR's next English/Arabic reference handbook will be a history and compilation of terms related to arms control verification and compliance.
- The United States Defense Threat Reduction Agency has developed a software program called 'RIST' to teach regional parties about conducting managed access inspections in a wide area facility.
- Sandia National Laboratories' Cooperative Monitoring Center has also developed a software program called 'ACE-IT' for training in the conduct of a Chemical Weapons Conventional inspection in a contained building.

#### COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKING

While the ACRS communications network had barely started before it ceased operations, the emergence of the Internet has provided new opportunities for cross-border contacts and engaging regional parties in discussions about regional security issues. It is also becoming a useful tool for Track Two projects to sustain collaboration work between meetings, organize meetings, and disseminate information and studies about regional security.

- University of Toronto's Munk Center for International Relations operates a discussion group on the Internet about regional security issues. This recently established group was built largely on the former network operated by SIPRI between 1995 and 1998. The Munk Center is also developing a web site that will include a Middle East regional security digital library posting links to and publications from other Track Two projects.
- The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies publishes an Internet newsletter entitled *Middle East Review of International Affairs* that reaches over 3,000 recipients, including individuals throughout the region.
- Search for Common Ground publishes the *Bulletin of Regional Cooperation in the Middle East*, which reports on recent Track Two activities, publications and has a calendar of upcoming events.
- Gulf/2000 project operates an electronic forum on the Internet with 500 members that focuses on issues related to the Gulf region.

### *Observations on Track Two*

Collectively, the various activities are achieving the twelve objectives for Track Two described above. What emerges from the list of activities is proof that Track Two can carry forward with many ideas, programmes and studies that were also broached in the formal negotiations. While not a continuation of ACRS, a few projects do resemble the activities of the working group. What was left undone in ACRS has indirectly helped to define what should be done in Track Two. But these projects have tended to focus on long-term security issues and less on immediate crises. Also, several Track Two projects have overcome one shortcoming of ACRS by reaching out and engaging Iranians, Syrians and Lebanese in regional security discussions.

*What was left undone in ACRS has indirectly helped to define what should be done in Track Two.*

One element that is not very obvious when reviewing the robust list of activities is that Track Two has emerged as a true public-private partnership. Until recently, governments tended to shy away from academic activities that mirrored formal talks or non-binding negotiations, favouring traditional diplomatic channels. Track Two back-channel success stories, such as the 'Oslo Channel' leading to the 1993 breakthrough in talks between the Palestinians and Israelis, have caught the attention of governments. There is now broader appreciation that greater civil society involvement can help advance formal initiatives and reduce tensions in regional conflicts around the world.<sup>8</sup>

While most Track Two activities are organized and hosted by non-governmental organizations, governments are now the primary funding source for regional security-related Track Two projects. Based on their views of how Track Two can assist formal proceedings, government sponsors often generate the ideas for projects, seek out organizations to run them, provide assistance in planning events and, as needed, help make contacts with potential regional participants. Organizers of these projects consult with regional officials responsible for regional security as well as regional experts in order to ensure that the agendas for the workshops are relevant and that results from the workshop are reported. Indeed, there is some evidence that Track Two studies have shaped the thinking of some senior government officials about Middle East security issues, particularly on possible frameworks for a co-operative security regime.

Track One and Track Two security-related activities in the Middle East share at least two traits. Both are highly dependent upon the support of extra-regional governments for leadership and require extensive consultations with regional parties to be successful. In ACRS, the United States and the Russian Federation cosponsor the talks and take a leading role in organizing events. Other extra-

regional governments serve as mentors for various CBMs and host expert-level inter-sessional meetings. Likewise, without the support of extra-regional governments and NGOs it is highly doubtful that there would be a Track Two programme. Track Two is expensive and requires the consistent financial wherewithal and commitment of governments to support it. This is the case particularly for serial projects, which are the main focus of government sponsorship. Unlike the formal track, all expenses for travel and accommodations for Track Two meetings are provided by the host organization. A weeklong workshop in the Gulf for 100 people from throughout the Middle East and extra-regional countries, for example, can cost as much \$300,000. Regional institutions have sponsored workshops on regional security issues but these tend to be very limited in scope and participation, often excluding Israelis.

The United States Government contributes approximately \$1.5 million yearly to support Middle East security Track Two activities. This contribution comes from a variety of agencies including the State Department, the Department of Energy, the Department of Interior and the Department of Defense. Other extra-regional states, notably Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, collectively provide about \$500,000 per annum. These contributions demonstrate an abiding interest in regional security co-operation in the Middle East. Only a few private foundations, such as the Ford Foundation, W. Alton Jones Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, have shown interest in supporting regional security Track Two activities, and their support has generally been limited to single workshops.

When multilateral negotiations do resume, regional participants will need to define clearly the relevancy and role of security-related Track Two initiatives to the formal talks, particularly if Track Two is to continue receiving financial support from sponsoring governments that might be more inclined to direct all funding towards Track One. In theory, current Track Two activities can assist and complement the proceedings of the formal talks. These activities are less restricted by the political sensitivities that often circumscribe freedom of action within the formal talks. Track Two provides an informal setting for maximizing exchange and devising bridging proposals to overcome difficulties in Track One. These talks can be an incubator for new ideas that may be too sensitive or premature to broach in the formal talks. In this sense, Track Two can take the pulse of regional parties about a certain idea to see if it is worth pursuing in the formal track. Track Two also has more latitude to invite individuals from regional states outside the formal process to join in regional security discussions, serving as a 'half-way' house for outside states until they join the formal talks. Ultimately, it will be important to sustain Track Two as a safety net for keeping regional parties engaged in direct communication should formal talks stall again. Based on these suggested contributions, Track Two organizers can make a convincing case for continuing their efforts.

*Track Two can take the pulse of regional parties about a certain idea to see if it is worth pursuing in the formal track.*

## Conclusion

It has been nearly ten years since the current round of the Middle East peace negotiations was launched in Madrid. Although there has been significant movement in the bilateral negotiations between Israel and its immediate neighbours, deliberations on co-operative regional security and arms control have moved glacially. No region-wide arms control agreements have been negotiated. No regional confidence- and security-building measures have been implemented. The only formal regional forum that has tried to address these issues, the multilateral working group on Arms Control and Regional Security, has not met in nearly six years. Meanwhile, concerns about the proliferation of advanced conventional weapons, WMD, and ballistic missiles in the Middle East have increased.

While prospects for resuming ACRS or initiating a new regional forum in the near future remain dim, regional security-related Track Two activities have filled some of the void created by the abeyance of ACRS. A diverse and robust set of activities provides opportunities to press for resumption of the formal track, produce studies on issues relevant to the formal track, and expand the constituency for arms control and regional security. In some cases Track Two has moved beyond the limitations of ACRS and achieved more than the formal negotiations. For example, it has attracted representatives from regional states outside the ACRS process, brought together senior military officers, organized rigorous arms control training courses to expand the cadre of regional officials conversant on arms control, developed databases on military holdings and force structure asymmetries, established a broad-based communications network, produced arms control reference materials in Arabic, and exchanged and jointly analyzed complex regional data. Perhaps most importantly, Track Two has provided a constant stream of venues for regional officials and representatives to continue discussions on regional security and arms control while the formal talks are in abeyance. So far, Track Two has been immune from the political vagaries causing the ebb and flow in the formal negotiations.

But Track Two has its own set of limitations and challenges. Track Two cannot replace formal negotiations and, consequently, this constrains the agenda for Track Two meetings. It faces funding fatigue by sponsoring governments, especially if the peace process were to collapse. Also, some Arab parties may be less inclined to meet in the wake of recent difficulties in the Israeli-Palestinian track and calls to limit interaction with Israelis like the one by the Arab League in October 2000. Attracting new participants continues to be difficult, especially from cautious military organizations not accustomed to dealing with external NGOs.

Notwithstanding these challenges, Track Two is likely to remain the only venue for activities related to regional security for some time. It will continue building a broad base of individuals from Middle East countries who are informed about the elements for creating a stable co-operative regional security regime as an alternative to military conflict and rivalry. While dialogue and interaction do not immediately lead to agreement on the next steps to improve security, they help to mitigate misunderstandings and misperceptions that can get in the way of reaching agreement. Track Two can also lead to a common vision and language on security. Essentially, by the time formal negotiations resume, Track Two will have done most of the preparation and groundwork so those proceedings can move ahead swiftly. In addition to complementing and supporting ACRS, ultimately, one of the greatest contributions Track Two can make is the expansion of a culture of peace in the Middle East.

#### Notes

1. The other working groups focus on water, refugees, environment, and economic development.
2. See Secretary of State James Baker, Organizational Meeting for Multilateral Negotiations on the Middle East, *U.S. Department of State Dispatch Supplement*, February 1992, pp. 27–28; Fact Sheet: The Middle East Peace Process, *U.S. Department of State Dispatch Supplement*, August 1994, vol. 5, no. 7; Middle East Peace Process Multilateral Negotiations: Building a Regional Framework for Peace, *U.S. Department of State Brochure*, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, October 1994; Michael D. Yaffe, An Overview of the Middle East Peace Process: Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security, in: Fred Tanner, ed., *Arms Control, Confidence Building and Security Cooperation in the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East*, Malta, The Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, December 1994, pp. 93–100; Nabil Fahmy, Reflections on the Arms Control and Regional Security Process in the Middle East, in: James Brown, ed., *New Horizons and New Strategies in Arms Control*, New Mexico, Sandia National Laboratories, November 1998; Peter Jones, Arms Control in the Middle East: Some Reflections on ACRS, *Security Dialogue*, 1997, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 57–70; Bruce Jentleson, *The Middle East Arms Control and Regional Security Talks: Progress, Problems and Prospects*, California, Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, September 1996, Policy Paper No. 26; Joel Peters, *Building Bridges: The Arab-Israeli Multilateral Talks*, London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1994; Joel Peters, *Pathways to Peace: The Multilateral Arab-Israeli Peace Talks*, London, Royal

- Institute of International Affairs, 1996; and Dalia Dassa Kaye, Madrid's Forgotten Forum: The Middle East Multilaterals, *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 1997, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 167–86.
3. Copies of the ACRS Statement can be found in Shai Feldman and Abdullah Toukan, *Bridging the Gap: A Future Security Architecture for the Middle East*, New York, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1997, pp. 103–07 and in Shai Feldman, *Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1998, pp. 320–25.
  4. For the Israeli version of the long-term objectives statement, the only statement to be made public, see Eytan Bentsur, Israel's Vision on the Goals and Principles of the Regional Security and Arms Control Process, in: Tanner, op. cit., pp. 69–75.
  5. See note 2.
  6. Track Two publications include the following: Tanner, op. cit.; Richard Eisendorf, ed., *Arms Control and Security in the Middle East*, Washington, DC, Initiative for Peace and Cooperation in the Middle East, June 1995; United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, *National Threat Perceptions in the Middle East*, Geneva, United Nations, UNIDIR/95/33, 1995; Steven L. Spiegel and David J. Pervin, eds., *Practical Peacemaking in the Middle East — Volume I: Arms Control and Regional Security*, New York, Garland Publishing, Inc, 1995; Jan Prawitz and James F. Leonard, *A Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East*, Geneva, United Nations, UNIDIR/96/24, 1996; *Directory of Electronic Information Sources on Arms Control and Disarmament, and on the Middle East*, Canada, Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, August 1996; Peter Jones, Maritime Confidence-Building Measures in the Middle East, in: Jill R. Junnola, ed., *Maritime Confidence Building in Regions of Tensions*, Washington, DC, Henry L. Stimson Center, 1996; Feldman and Toukan, op. cit.; David N. Griffiths, ed., *Maritime Safety Colloquium 1997: Proceedings*, Canada, Canadian Coast Guard College, 1997; Wilton Park Conference Centre, *Arms Control in the Middle East: The Future Agenda?*, United Kingdom, Wilton Park Paper 133, October 1998; Bjorn Moller, Gustav Daniker, Shmuel Limone and Ioannis A. Stivachtis, *Non-Offensive Defense in the Middle East?*, Geneva, United Nations, UNIDIR/98/23, 1998; David N. Griffiths, ed., *Maritime Safety Colloquium 1998: Proceedings*, Canada, Canadian Coast Guard College, 1998; Gary Sick and Lawrence G. Potter, eds., *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security and Religion*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1998; Peter Jones, *Towards a Regional Security Regime for the Middle East: Issues and Options*, Stockholm, SIPRI, December 1998; David N. Griffiths, ed., *Maritime Safety Colloquium 1999: Proceedings*, Canada, Canadian Coast Guard College, 1999; Barry Schneider, ed., *Middle East Security Issues: In the Shadow of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation*, Alabama, Air University Press, December 1999; Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Military Balance in the Middle East: An Executive Summary*, California, Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, Policy Paper No. 49, March 1999; United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and the Cooperative Monitoring Center, *The Potential Uses of Commercial Satellite Imagery in the Middle East: Workshop Report*, Geneva, United Nations, September 1999; and David N. Griffiths, *Maritime Aspects of Arms Control and Security Improvements in the Middle East*, California, Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, Policy Paper No. 56, June 2000.
  7. The United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency was abolished in April 1999 and its functions were absorbed into the United States Department of State.
  8. See David L. Phillips, Track Two: Beyond Traditional Diplomacy, *State Magazine*, U.S. Department of State, November 2000, No. 440, pp. 25–29.