

FOREWORD

The Middle East, for over half a century, has been confronted with an irresolvable dilemma. One of the major security concerns is the threat posed by the existence of weapons of mass destruction in this volatile region. The proposals to create a zone free of nuclear weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in the Middle East were important attempts at tackling these concerns on a regional basis. These proposals are not new. Egypt and Iran first proposed a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) in 1974 to the First Committee of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). In April 1990 Egypt took the idea a step further, proposing the creation of a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East to include nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

Although it has been thirty years since the Egyptian and Iranian proposal, the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons is still a very real concern in the region. Efforts to create a WMDFZ, such as the Security Council Resolution 687 (1991) to eliminate Iraq's WMD programmes as a first step "towards the goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free from WMD" and the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference decision to pursue a nuclear free zone in the region have not been sustained. The result? The Middle East seems no closer to realising the aims of a WMDFZ than it was thirty years ago nor is the region any safer.

Although all twenty-two Arab states have joined the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), yet a number of Arab states have not signed other global treaties such as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) or the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). On the other hand, Israel is the only state in the region that has yet to join the NPT. Israel has not yet ratified the CWC nor joined the BTWC and has yet to ratify the CTBT. Israel has not overtly demonstrated a nuclear capability, preferring a policy of ambiguity and opacity, which has caused a lot of speculation over the extent of its nuclear capabilities and weapons development programmes.

Recent developments in the region give mixed signals. Revelations of the leakage of nuclear technology to countries in the region from the

Pakistan/A Q Khan network have not served to allay the proliferation concerns. However, Libya's decision to declare and relinquish its clandestine WMD programmes is a step forward. The steps taken to halt Iranian and Libyan nuclear programmes, though a significant step in the right direction, should not be reason for the international community and states in the region to rest on their laurels. There is still a great deal of work to be done in bringing proposals for a Middle East WMDFZ to fruition in order that peace and security prevail.

It is evident that Arab and Israeli security requirements and threat perceptions remain at opposing ends. This deep mistrust has only lent itself to the self-perpetuating cycle of WMD proliferation, hence creating more insecurity. In high-conflict environments, it is necessary to lay the foundation for regional security and the gradual transition from zero-sum attitudes to cooperative win-win frameworks, which would serve shared interests in stability and survival. In this process, the development and implementation of a wide range of confidence-building measures play important roles.

In response to the need for regional arms control and disarmament and on the eve of the US-led attack on Iraq in 2003, the League of Arab States (LAS) and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) held a conference in Cairo on "*Building a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East: Global Non-Proliferation Regimes and Regional Experiences*".

This volume is an edited collection of the papers presented at the conference. It is our hope that the papers will advance the prospects for peace and security in the Middle East by bringing the issue to the attention of a wider audience. We should particularly like to thank the authors of these papers for their contribution. Special thanks also go to Anita Blétry, Christophe Carle, Julie French, Vanessa Martin and Kerry Maze from UNIDIR and Fadi Achaia, Mohammed Sobih and Mai Abo-Hashima from the LAS for their efforts in bringing this publication to fruition.

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