

PERSPECTIVES, DRIVERS, AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE MIDDLE EAST WMD-FREE ZONE:

VOICES FROM THE REGION

Edited by Tomisha Bino, James Revill and Chen Zak Kane



MIDDLE EAST WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION FREE ZONE SERIES



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACRS	Arms control and regional security working group
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
B(T)WC	Biological (and Toxin) Weapons Convention
CBM	confidence-building measure
CBRN	chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear
CTBTO	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
CWC	Chemical Weapons Convention
EMFG	Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GIA	Armed Islamic Group
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missiles
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
LAS	League of Arab States
ME WMDfz	Middle East weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
NWFZ	nuclear-weapons-free zone
NWS	nuclear-weapon-states
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
TPNW	Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
UNSCOM	United Nations Special Commission
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

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KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

TOMISHA BINO



INTRODUCTION

States in the Middle East have supported the establishment of a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (ME WMDFZ) for almost 50 years – albeit with different ideas about what the objectives of such a process are and how to achieve them. Despite several resolutions, reports and plans of action in different international and regional forums, progress has been meagre at best.

Regional security in the Middle East remains precarious, with ongoing conflicts, the development and use of chemical weapons, terrorism, and state fragility. Over the past decades, long-standing regional challenges have been compounded by changes in the security environment in the Middle East, which have in turn created new security concerns and challenges that complicate the attainment of a ME WMDFZ even further. Nevertheless, other more recent developments in the region, such as talks between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran,¹ the reconciliation in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC),² and the Abraham Accords, could ease tensions in the region and create new opportunities for talks on regional security and on how to approach non-proliferation and disarmament of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The most recent milestone of the ME WMDFZ process was the convening in November 2019 of the first and second sessions of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction in November of 2019 and 2021 following the adoption of the Arab group draft decision in the United Nations General Assembly from 2018.³ From the statements made by participating states

1 "Saudi Arabia Confirms Recent Talks with Iran", Aljazeera, 3 October 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/3/saudi-arabia-confirms-recent-talks-with-iran>

2 "Gulf Reconciliation Agreement: What We Know So Far", Aljazeera, 6 January 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/6/blockading-nations-drop-13-demands-on-qatar-sources>

3 General Assembly, A/DEC/73/546, 22 December 2018, [https://undocs.org/en/A/73/49\(Vol.II\)](https://undocs.org/en/A/73/49(Vol.II))

during the first and second sessions of this conference, it was clear that the process requires further conceptual clarity on what a ME WMDFZ would look like and which security concerns it would aim to address. Common themes in the statements of participating states were concerns over regional proliferation of WMD and Israel's nuclear programme.⁴

In the 1990s, the initial Iranian–Egyptian proposal for a Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) from 1974 was expanded by Egypt to include all WMD and their delivery systems.⁵ The new scope of the zone was designed to respond to the increased threats posed by the acquisition, use and threat of further use of WMD in the region. It was thus envisaged by Egypt that the zone would address all categories of WMD, prevent future programmes, and create a symmetry in disarmament and non-proliferation obligations. The scope was therefore expanded in the hope of invigorating the engagement of states in the region by addressing more of their concerns. In addition to the asymmetry in membership to the main WMD treaties, there has also been variance in levels of engagement of Middle Eastern states in the different ME WMDFZ meetings, such as in the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group (ACRS) in the 1990s, the informal consultations in Glion and Geneva in the early 2010s, and the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction process initiated in 2019.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The essays in this report aim to identify the incentives of different states in the region to engage in the ME WMDFZ negotiating processes. In addition, the essays consider the disincentives or missing incentives that have precluded such engagement. The report, therefore, aims to present the different perspectives that helped (or hindered) engagement in three ways:

- It provides a better understanding of the political, economic, and security dilemmas of states of the region and specific concerns related to a ME WMDFZ;
- It helps highlight points of convergence that can be built upon and points of divergence that need to be bridged;
- It informs the design of ongoing and future processes or initiatives on the ME WMDFZ and regional security in general.

The report has been developed through two methods. First was the solicitation of essays from experts from eight countries in the Middle East – Algeria, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, the State of Palestine, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – on the “Perspectives, drivers and objectives for a ME WMDFZ”. The second was a two-day authors’ roundtable at which the authors exchanged views on each other’s essays to further refine and develop them, including through a discussion of the common themes and ideas that emerged from the essays.

4 All statements can be found under: United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction”, November 2019, <https://meetings.unoda.org/section/conference-on-the-establishment-of-a-middle-east-zone-free-of-nuclear-weapons-and-other-weapons-of-mass-destruction-general-statements-3079/>

5 The Mubarak initiative of 1990 expanded the scope of the zone from only nuclear weapons to cover chemical and biological weapons as well. The need for this arose from the use of chemical weapons during the Iran–Iraq War, the discovery of Iraq’s chemical and biological weapons programmes, and threats by Saddam Hussain to use chemical weapons against Israel. Delivery systems were first included in the scope of the zone in United Nations Security Council resolution 687 and later in the Middle East Resolution adopted by the 1995 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review and Extension Conference.

These essays reflect the personal views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of any state, UNIDIR or the United Nations. As such, each author is responsible only for his or her essay. Each essay has been peer-reviewed by an expert from the same country as the author.

The following sections provide a discussion and analysis of the essays and ideas that emerged from the round table.

KEY FINDINGS

The framework used to analyse the perspectives, drivers and objectives for a ME WMDfZ was to look at three different categories of driver for engagement with a ME WMDfZ that were identified by the essay authors: security, reputational and economic drivers. Each category is further broken down into incentives, disincentives and, in one case, missing incentives. These sections then examine in greater depth the different incentives and the perspectives that help shape them, as well as suggested approaches to the most pressing of the related security concerns.

Security incentives

WMD are primarily treated by states as a national security issue. As such, a state's decision to negotiate, join and adhere to any future agreement will first and foremost depend on whether it perceives the process itself and the treaty concluded as enhancing its national security or at least as not undermining it. It is then no surprise that all authors identify security incentives as the main motivation for engagement with the ME WMDfZ. However, both the perceived causes of insecurity and the suggested responses to insecurity vary, in some cases seemingly irreconcilably. It is also no surprise that several authors link perceptions of insecurity to mistrust between the states of the region.⁶

Since the resolution on the "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East" was first adopted in the General Assembly in 1974, the stated goal of its co-sponsors – Iran and Egypt – has been that establishing such a zone will strengthen the global non-proliferation norm and the promotion of the universalization of the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), as well as contribute to regional peace and non-proliferation.⁷ At the time, the only regional proliferation concern expressed by several Middle Eastern states was connected to Israel's refusal to accede to the NPT.⁸

The concerns around Israel's nuclear programme are persistent and pervasive in the discourse on a ME WMDfZ. This is reflected in four of the eight essays in this collection, which, as the authors from Egypt and Iraq put it, perceive Israel's "refusal to participate in the United Nations-sponsored multilateral negotiations"⁹ as the "primary obstacle . . . to achieving meaningful progress on the ME WMDfZ concept".¹⁰ The essay from Iran also identifies Israel as a significant source of threat, second only to the United States.

6 See the essays from Egypt, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates of the report.

7 General Assembly, A/RES/3263(XXIX), 9 December 1974, [https://undocs.org/A/RES/3263\(XXIX\)](https://undocs.org/A/RES/3263(XXIX)); General Assembly, A/PV.2250, 1 October 1974, p. 322, para. 57–59, <https://undocs.org/A/PV.2250>; and General Assembly, A/PV.2264, 10 October 1974, <https://undocs.org/A/PV.2264>

8 General Assembly, A/C.1/PV.2006, 31 October 1974, <https://undocs.org/A/C.1/PV.2006> (Sudan and Qatar); General Assembly, A/C.1/PV.2010, 6 November 1974, <https://undocs.org/A/C.1/PV.2010> (United Arab Emirates); and General Assembly, A/C.1/PV.2001, 25 October 1974, <https://undocs.org/A/C.1/PV.2001>

9 Hussain Al-Shahristani, "Iraq's approach to the ME WMDfZ: Heeding lessons from the past," in *Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the ME WMDfZ: Voices from the Region*, eds. Tomisha Bino, James Revill and Chen Zak Kane (Geneva: UNIDIR) 2022.

10 Karim Haggag, "Egypt's long-standing diplomatic investment," in *Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the ME WMDfZ: Voices from the Region*, eds. Tomisha Bino, James Revill and Chen Zak Kane (Geneva: UNIDIR) 2022.

A forum for dialogue and cooperative security would help address some of the sources of mistrust in the region, such as the high levels of threat rhetoric, the possibility of armed conflict related to offensive and defensive military capabilities, and the imbalances in capabilities between states in the Middle East.

Over the last two decades, however, Iran has also emerged as a proliferation concern in the region and is identified as such by three of the eight essays. Notably, the author from Saudi Arabia explicitly argues that Iran's pursuit of a nuclear programme was a reaction to Israel's programme. The authors from Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia also argue that concerns over Israel's and Iran's nuclear programmes are exacerbated by the direct and indirect threats each makes against the other. According to these authors, these threats undermine prospects for dialogue, increase mistrust and push each party into a defensive position.

Prohibition of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons

All the authors agree that the weapons prohibited under a ME WMDFZ should include nuclear, chemical, and biological weapon systems and their delivery systems, as laid out in the 1995 NPT Resolution on the Middle East.¹¹ Indeed, all authors agree that the zone would prohibit the acquisition, development, possession and use of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and that states that possess such weapons would have to disarm. The author from Israel emphasized, however, that the conversation on WMD disarmament cannot be the departure point. He argued that Israel would want to see a more open-ended process, where the objective is to address regional security concerns more broadly (with WMD being one among a number of issues) before it commits to any obligations. This highlights a fundamental difference between Israel and other states on the objectives as well as departure point for any talks involving WMD disarmament.

DELIVERY SYSTEMS

There is still debate on how or whether "delivery systems" – of which no agreed definition exists – should be part of the scope of ME WMDFZ. The 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, which is commonly regarded as setting the terms of reference for a ME WMDFZ, specifies that the ME WMDFZ should be one that is "free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems."¹²

In addition to non-proliferation concerns related to Iran's nuclear programme, the country's missile programme was also considered a security concern in some essays. The author from Saudi Arabia argued that the issue of delivery systems, including missiles, should be addressed within the framework of a ME WMDFZ. Yet in discussions during the authors' roundtable, the author from Iraq described the inclusion of missiles in a ME WMDFZ negotiation without proper definitions as "muddying the waters" and considered that the prohibition and elimination of the payloads obviates the need to address the question of delivery systems. The author from Saudi Arabia also highlights that the threat of missile capabilities in the region isn't limited to use by states but is further compounded by the threat of their transfer to terrorists.

¹¹ 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, "Resolution on the Middle East", NPT/CONF.1995/32 (Part I), Annex, 1995, [https://undocs.org/NPT/CONF.1995/32\(PartI\)](https://undocs.org/NPT/CONF.1995/32(PartI))

¹² Ibid., para. 6.

The author from Egypt emphasized that missiles are an integral component of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East calling for the establishment of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems in the region, adopted as part of the package of decisions of the indefinite extension of the NPT. However, he argued that a gradual approach can be adopted towards this objective beginning with transparency and confidence-building measures, which regulate their use, thereby allowing for more options in addressing the challenges posed by missile systems to regional security, without detracting from national security objectives. This view was also shared by the author from Iran. Neither author specifies whether these measures would be included as part of the zone negotiation or treaty, in parallel with it, or in a particular sequence.

Allowing for flexibility in how to regulate missile capabilities was seen by some authors as important given the difficulty of defining and categorizing these systems. To help address the lack of an agreed definition, the author from Egypt suggested that the United States–Russian Federation bilateral agreements covering strategic ballistic missiles, verification of decommissioning and deconstruction platforms, payloads and range could be used as a yardstick for a future regional agreement.

CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WEAPON TERRORISM

The security concerns related to terrorists and terrorist groups are not limited to missile proliferation but extend to all classes of WMD. The author from Algeria contends that terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb “continues to pursue chemical, biological and radioactive materials for hostile use, and has established training camps in the region, particularly in the Sahel area mainly in Libya and Niger, for the purposes of chemical and biological terrorism.” It is difficult to substantiate these assertions due to the secrecy surrounding such groups. Similarly, the essay from Iraq describes an incident in which fighters from the Islamic State group attempted to penetrate a bunker at the Muthanna chemical facility. This housed rockets and other munitions filled with aged chemical agents that had been sealed after the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) left in 1994. In this case, the attempt was unsuccessful, but the author describes it as a “lucky break”.

REGIONAL SECURITY

Aside from addressing specific security concerns, several essays view the establishment of a ME WMDFZ as a means by itself for enhancing regional security on itself. As pointed out by the author from Egypt and in comments by other authors during the roundtable, momentum in the ME WMDFZ process could create a forum for dialogue and cooperative security – either preceding the establishment of the zone or subsuming its negotiations, as part of it or in parallel – that could help curb the military build-up in the region and achieve greater security for all. Having such a forum was also seen as a means to address some of the sources of mistrust in the region, such as the high levels of threat rhetoric, the possibility of armed

conflict related to offensive and defensive military capabilities, and the imbalances in capabilities between states, in addition to the supply by extraregional powers of military capabilities to some Middle Eastern states. Interestingly, the authors from Iran and Israel both see positive security incentives emerging from the process of negotiation. Specifically, both essays identify great benefits from other processes involving confidence-building measures (CBMs) and regional security taking place prior to zone negotiations. The author from Iran stresses that “starting to talk about a security structure and which would then subsume a ME WMDFZ is a condition for conclusion of an agreement on the issue.”¹³

SECURITY DISINCENTIVES

Despite the consensus among all authors that a ME WMDFZ holds security benefits for all states in the region, the essays from Iran and Israel also identify security-related disincentives of the process or being part of a zone.

While several of the essays identify the security threat of the Israeli nuclear arsenal, the essay from Israel stresses that “the sense is that [Israel’s] ambiguous deterrent policy and strategy are vital, in the simplest sense, to securing the lives of every Israeli, man, woman, and child”. According to the author, Israel remains concerned that a ME WMDFZ would drag Israel into a process where it would be forced into actions that harm its own national security. The author further notes how Israel’s deterrent posture is viewed recently by some states of the region as “an asset against both Iran’s revolutionary and disruptive role and Erdogan’s overtly neo-Ottoman ambitions”.

A similar national security rationale is identified in the essay from Iran when it comes to the question of missiles. The author notes, “While supporting a [ME WMDFZ] may enhance Iran’s security interests, any restrictions on missile programmes will jeopardize Iranian security and serve as a disincentive to engagement in the WMDFZ project”.

MISSING SECURITY INCENTIVES

All the authors, in both their essays and the roundtable, identified a genuine need for security dialogue among the states of the region. However, they suggest that some of the incentives to facilitate such a dialogue are missing. Of particular note is the absence of any type of road map to pave the way towards such a dialogue, either through or as part of a ME WMDFZ. In addition, the authors from Iran and Israel stressed the need for such an approach that seeks to establish a regional security structure, with the author from Israel highlighting the lessons and progress achieved by the ACRS working group as an example of how this could be achieved.

In a similar vein to the arguments on the benefits of having a broader regional security dialogue, it is suggested that a broader geographic delineation of the ME WMDFZ could address more of the security concerns of states and in turn

13 Nasser Hadian, “Iran and the Middle East WMD-free zone: An opportunity for regional dialogue,” in *Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the ME WMDFZ: Voices from the Region*, eds. Tomisha Bino, James Reville and Chen Zak Kane (Geneva: UNIDIR) 2022.



increase engagement by states in the region. The working definition of the geographic delineation for the ME WMDFZ has been the 22 member states of the League of Arab States (LAS), Iran and Israel since it was suggested in a 1990 United Nations study on measures to facilitate the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.¹⁴

The 1990 United Nations study also noted other possible delineations, such as the one from a 1989 study by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).¹⁵ The 1990 United Nations study also considered the idea of dividing the states of the region into “working lists” of core and peripheral countries – the core countries would initiate and negotiate the agreement and the peripheral countries would be needed to bring it into force – and discussed how to possibly engage with Turkey, Cyprus, Malta, Pakistan and Afghanistan. More recent ideas that address specific subregional proliferation threats have considered the delineation and negotiation of a Gulf WMD-free zone.¹⁶ At the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, the states decided to list all current members of the LAS as well as Iran and Israel as members of the conference, and by extension for the a future zone, in its rules of procedure.¹⁷

Security concerns are mirrored in the security incentives or missing incentives that the authors identify. For some authors, the sources of perceived threats include countries in the region that are not within the current geographic delineation of the ME WMDFZ, such as Turkey. Security concerns regarding Turkey originate from Turkey’s involvement in several conflicts in the region, the stationing of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nuclear weapons on its soil, and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s remarks about the possibility of Turkey acquiring its own nuclear capability.¹⁸

14 General Assembly, “Study on Effective and Verifiable Measures which would Facilitate the Establishment of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East”, Report of the Secretary-General, A/45/435, 10 October 1990, <https://undocs.org/A/45/435>

15 The IAEA zone would extend from Libya in the west to Iran in the east, and from Syria in the north to Yemen in the south. International Atomic Energy Agency, General Conference, 33rd Regular Session, “Technical Study on Different Modalities of Application of Safeguards in the Middle East”, GC(XXXIII)/887, 29 August 1989, <https://unidir.org/node/5632>

16 “The Declaration of the Gulf WMDFZ Initiative by the GCC Secretary-General”, December 2005, <https://unidir.org/node/5650>

17 Second session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, “Rules of Procedure,” A/CONF.236/2021/3, 2021, <https://undocs.org/A/CONF.236/2021/3>

18 S. Bugos, “Turkey Shows Nuclear Weapons Interest”, Arms Control Today, October 2019, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-10/news/turkey-shows-nuclear-weapons-interest>

The author from Egypt expressed the view that the current delineation should not be changed as the security and WMD challenges in the region are covered by the same regional security complex. Although the authors from Iran and Israel suggest the possibility of changing the delineation to better reflect security dynamics and concerns in the region, and to include Turkey, for example they agree that changing the long-standing delineation might significantly complicate the process and might have an adverse effect on the level of engagement. However, even if Turkey is not to be included as a member of a ME WMDFZ through a change in the delineation, authors felt that it would be necessary to find a way to engage Turkey within the framework of a ME WMDFZ due to its central role in the region. One way of doing so would be through additional protocols, such as those that would relate to the obligations to nuclear-weapon-states (NWS) vis-à-vis the zone.

The question of the geographic delineation of the zone has implications for the negotiation process and format according to several authors. Given the current geographic delineation, the negotiation would include the 22 LAS members, Iran and Israel. However, some essays suggest different compositions or formats for the negotiation, which they further discussed during the authors' round table. Suggested alternatives are either an attempt to address specific security concerns or are suggested as a negotiation practicality to ease the task of achieving an agreement among 24 states.

The author from Iran suggests that having a smaller group of countries negotiating what the author defines as the main fault lines of regional security with states such as Turkey, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt may have a better chance of success. The author goes on to explain the choice of these "core" states by saying that it is "based on their capabilities and expertise on the issue: Israel is believed to have nuclear weapons; Iran is believed to be a threshold nuclear state; Egypt has been in the forefront of the diplomatic fight for a Middle East free of WMD; Turkey is believed to host nuclear weapons; and Saudi Arabia has considered acquiring nuclear weapons as a deterrent". In terms of the practicality of such an arrangement, the essay argues that, having 5 parties in the initial negotiation could be a more manageable format than having 24 or more countries at once. On the other hand, there is a recognition by all authors that all countries in the region should have a seat at the table and it would adversely affect their engagement if they did not feel that their views were included throughout the process. The essay from the United Arab Emirates, for example, emphasizes the importance of inclusiveness for the success of the negotiations and its role in fostering trust among the states.

In supporting the argument for a smaller group approach, such as the Gulf WMD-free zone, the author from Saudi Arabia argues that there are subregional dynamics that could affect the start or success of the ME WMDFZ negotiation. To help mitigate these, he suggests that a "clear and honest dialogue at a subregional level could

The commitment and importance for Saudi Arabia of having a leadership role in the region could also be considered reputational incentive for it to engage in a ME WMDFZ .

also support efforts toward realizing the ME WMDFZ by addressing tensions and mistrust between GCC states and Iran.” During the roundtable, authors envisaged that any smaller group or subregional approach to talks that aim addressed concerns and issues specific to the subregion would coalesce at a later stage to negotiate a region-wide agreement for a ME WMDFZ.

REPUTATIONAL INCENTIVES

The wider literature suggests that states can accrue reputational or prestige-related benefits from joining arms control treaties and demonstrating “their dedication to the cause of peace”.¹⁹ This is borne out in seven of the eight essays, which all saw reputational benefits for their country’s engagement with the ME WMDFZ. Both authors from Israel and Iran viewed engagement in an arms control or disarmament process as a means of attaining good standing in the international community. The author from Iraq notes that in his country’s case it demonstrates a strong break from its WMD past. Some authors, such those from Iran, Palestine, and the United Arab Emirates, also identified additional secondary benefits that could be generated through achieving good standing in the international community. For example, the author from Iran suggests that there is a reputational benefit for Iran to reduce the perception of an Iranian WMD threat to the region, which in turn could lead to a reduction in the military build-up in the region. The author from Palestine argues that being a member of good standing in the international community is an important element of Palestine’s state-building process. Lastly, the author from the United Arab Emirates (the first Arab country to launch a nuclear power plant), emphasized that developing its nuclear sector further requires maintaining a reputation for complying with its international non-proliferation commitments and as a responsible nuclear energy provider. The author argued that The United Arab Emirates, to an extent, views its membership of a ME WMDFZ as an extension of its current membership of other international treaties and bodies. Such a membership would enable it to strengthen its nuclear energy sector and build its local legal and regulatory capacity through cooperation with other members of the international community.

At a regional level, the author from Saudi Arabia explains that the country’s support for a ME WMDFZ is part of the country’s active and leading role in cooperative regional structures, such as the LAS and the GCC. Thus, the commitment and importance for Saudi Arabia of having a leadership role in the region could also be considered reputational incentive for it to engage in a ME WMDFZ and reinforce and perhaps even expand this leadership role in the region.

Finally, as one of the states that has initiated and taken a lead role in most efforts to realize a ME WMDFZ (and continues to do so), Egypt’s drivers and (dis)incentives cannot only be seen to be emanating from the process. Given its significant diplomatic investment in the process, it can be argued that Egypt has both a reputational incentive for the process to succeed and a reputational disincentive if Egypt were to change the national security rationale on which it based its zone strategy.

19 J. Goldblatt, *Arms Control: The New Guide to Negotiations and Agreement*, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002, p. 12.

REPUTATIONAL DISINCENTIVES

As with security concerns, some authors outline reputational concerns related to the ME WMDFZ. The author from Israel argues that changing its deterrence policy could have reputational repercussions as the country's deterrence posture has not only served to stave off attacks from adversaries but has also "made Israel into an attractive partner for now openly avowed friends in the Gulf and Eastern Mediterranean". Thus, a change in its posture might have a negative effect on this new regional role and, by extension, the regional balance of power.

ECONOMIC INCENTIVES AND ASSISTANCE

In addition to security and reputational incentives, the wider literature also identifies potential economic incentives to treaty participation.²⁰ In the ME WMDFZ context, the most obvious economic incentives are the prospects for technology transfer and international cooperation around nuclear, chemical, and biological technologies and materials for peaceful purpose. These too are borne out in this study, particularly by the authors from Algeria and the United Arab Emirates, which both identify economic benefits as incentives for their support for a ME WMDFZ.

Interacting with the reputational incentive, the United Arab Emirates places importance on building confidence in the safe and secure use of dual-use technology. For the United Arab Emirates, this could help overcome proliferation concerns and facilitate growth in its nuclear power sector. This also extends to other sectors, such as chemical and biological industries. Through the establishment of a ME WMDFZ, the author from the United Arab Emirates notes that her country would look to cooperate with others in the region and internationally on peaceful nuclear, chemical and biological research projects, as well as participate in the development of export control systems for the dual-use chemical and biological materials that it would require to develop those sectors.

The potential economic benefits that Algeria would hope to derive from its membership of a ME WMDFZ are closely linked to concerns over terrorist activity in and around its territory. Terrorism poses a threat to the security of critical Algerian industries such as energy facilities (whether mining, hydrocarbon or nuclear) and pharmaceutical industries. Although it remains unclear whether a ME WMDFZ would include measures to address the threat of WMD terrorism, the essay from Algeria advocates for such an option as Algeria and other states in the region could reap economic benefits from such a provision.

The need for regional coordination, capacity-building, and the provision of assistance in formulating legislative or regulatory measures to prohibit and prevent WMD use by terrorists, as well as assistance in emergency mitigation in case of their use, is described by the authors from Algeria and Iraq. The author from Algeria argues that, despite Algeria's existing regulatory measures to ensure chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) safety and security, there is still a need for "coordination at the international, regional,

²⁰ S. Willett, *Costs of Disarmament – Disarming the Costs: Nuclear Arms Control and Nuclear Rearmament*, UNIDIR, 2003, <https://www.unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/costs-of-disarmament-disarming-the-costs-nuclear-arms-control-and-nuclear-rearmament-306.pdf>; and R.D. Gibbons, "Supply to Deny: The Benefits of Nuclear Assistance for Nuclear Nonproliferation", *Journal of Global Security Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, December 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz059>

and subregional levels. It also required enhanced regional capacity-building and measures to support assistance and protection against these weapons.” The author from Iraq argues that treaty provisions on assistance could further incentivize states to join a ME WMD FZ and capitalize on each other’s capabilities. Given Iraq’s experiences with chemical weapon destruction, the author suggested that it could provide “assistance in chemical weapons destruction, a multilateral commitment to prohibit and prevent terrorists from securing dual-use materials that can be used in WMD, or perhaps provision of assistance in the event of the use of WMD in any territory of the states parties.”

LOOKING FORWARD

The mistrust among states in the region is a thread that runs through both the essays and round-table discussion. This mistrust has contributed to many of the disincentives or missing incentives identified by the essays and outlined above.

All the essays include at least one measure to address mistrust indicating that it is a major obstacle to progress. These measures can be grouped into two types of approach: cooperative and coercive.

Cooperative approaches include the creation of measures and mechanisms to build trust or, at least, ease mistrust. The authors’ suggestions include the adoption of CBMs; the importance of reliable verification, compliance-monitoring and enforcement mechanisms; and the need for direct dialogue in regional security forums.

Suggestions for *coercive approaches* include creating mechanisms to guarantee compliance and enforcement that would address mistrust. For example, Security Council resolutions could impose and “police” the zone; a process led by the United Nations Secretary-General and held under UN auspices would circumvent the need for direct dialogue between states that do not have diplomatic ties; or by charging the five permanent members of the Security Council (most prominently the United States) could with the enforcement of the agreement.

Cooperative approaches	Coercive approaches
Adoption of transparency- and confidence-building measures	Imposition of sanctions on states that do not join a ME WMD FZ through a Security Council resolution
Development of reliable verification, compliance-monitoring and enforcement mechanisms	Indirect dialogue under a United Nations mandate and auspices
Direct dialogue in regional security forums	Pressure to join a ME WMD FZ and its enforcement by the P5

The desire for forums for regional dialogue to promote understanding and address a wider range of security concerns was a common theme throughout the essays, especially as a response to the changing role of the United States in the Middle East.

The paragraphs below give an overview of the suggestions under both approaches.

FORUMS, PARALLEL PROCESSES AND CBMS

The most common approach to addressing the identified sources of mistrust is the call for forums for dialogue, especially ones that would address regional security concerns beyond WMD. This signals a genuine desire for a cooperative approach to regional security, or at the very least the recognition of the need to be heard and understood, and to understand the perspectives of others.

The author from the United Arab Emirates stresses the importance of creating a space to “foster a better understanding of the different views and positions of states, demonstrate good faith, and build trust among the different parties by creating a space for regional dialogue and cooperation.” The author from Iran also contends that it is “crucial to begin a dialogue and to have a forum where we can disagree but that nevertheless gives us the opportunity to talk, share and understand each other.”

The desire for forums for regional dialogue to promote understanding and address a wider range of security concerns was a common theme especially as a response to the changing role of the United States in the Middle East and the need for states in the region to take greater responsibility for their own security. As the author from the United Arab Emirates notes, the perceived retreat in the engagement of the international community, and especially the United States, from the region has made it “crucial to find regional mechanisms to resolve the issues that threaten the security of the region and prevent it from achieving the stability and prosperity it strives for.” The essay from Palestine goes further and identifies secondary benefits that could emerge from the establishment of regional security dialogue, namely an opportunity to address the long-standing Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

Despite consensus among authors on the importance of forums and dialogue on regional security, they differ on how such forums would relate to a ME WMDFZ. There were three perspectives on this within the group of authors, with some viewing one or more of these perspectives as possible.

The first perspective is that the ME WMDFZ is the forum for such dialogue and could be a steppingstone for other talks that would address broader regional security matters. This is supported by all authors, apart from the author from Israel, who emphasizes that Israel would not agree to a process with a fixed objective (i.e., a ME WMDFZ). It would instead want to see an open-ended process where more regional security concerns could be discussed more broadly (of which WMD is one among a number of issues) before it commits to any obligations.

In the second perspective, the ME WMDFZ process could be complemented by a parallel process that looks at broader regional issues. This is supported by all authors, but it is clear that there are varied and sometimes diverging views on the elements and the format of such a complementary and parallel process to that of the ME WMDFZ process. For example, there are differing views on whether such talks would take place in or outside the region and whether they would be under United Nations auspices. Past experiences, including the ACRS process and the informal consultations in Glion and Geneva, inform to some degree the positions of states in the region. However, perceptions of these past experiences, and especially the ACRS talks, differ among the authors. For example, the author from Israel, views the talks favourably, and saw that they generated commonalities between Israel and a good number of its neighbours and participants in the process. In contrast, the essay from Egypt recalls how “Israel’s adamant refusal to address the nuclear issue” resulted in the collapse of the talks. Both these recollections still influence how both parties view each other’s negotiating style and motivations. Drawing on the experience of other regions, the author from Saudi Arabia raises the possibility of structuring talks on regional security similar to the Helsinki process, which resulted in agreement on the 1975 Helsinki Accords. He stresses how this could contribute to addressing the mistrust between states in the region. The example of Helsinki is commonly raised in the context of the ME WMDFZ, with several experts calling for such a process for the Middle East.²¹

According to the third perspective, the negotiation of a ME WMDFZ needs to be preceded by a regional security dialogue. This could create CBMs that would build the trust needed among the states of the region before they can engage in an arms control and disarmament process, without compromising their particular security situation. This perspective is only supported by the authors from Israel and Iran. The author from Egypt disagrees with this position, holding that arms control is not about conflict resolution, but rather conflict management, and questions to what extent, if at all, other issues need to be addressed first.

CBMs are generally viewed as useful by all authors. However, the authors disagree over what types of measure would be useful, when they would be employed and to what ends. These views are either based on a state’s current threat perceptions or on attempt to design a process that avoids previous pitfalls. An example of the former can be found in the essay by the author from Iran, where he envisages that an agreement on missiles could be seen as an important CBM, were it to be “mutual and reciprocal among the states of the region and coupled with certain agreements with Western states.”²² The author from Saudi Arabia also suggested that CBMs between Iran and its neighbours could help create better conditions for a fruitful ME WMDFZ process.

CBMs are generally viewed as useful by all authors. However, the authors disagree over what types of measure would be useful, when they would be employed and to what ends.

²¹ See, for example, V. Cserveny et al., *Building a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East: Global Non-Proliferation Regimes and Regional Experiences*, UNIDIR, 2004, https://www.baselpeaceoffice.org/sites/default/files/imce/menwzf/building_a_wmd_free_zone_in_the_middle_east_unidir.pdf; and N. Fahmy and K. Haggag, “The Helsinki Process and the Middle East: The Viability of Cooperative Security Frameworks for a Region in Flux”, in C. Kane and E. Murauskaite (eds.), *Regional Security Dialogue in the Middle East*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315773865>

²² Nasser Hadian, “Iran and the Middle East WMD-free zone: An opportunity for regional dialogue.”

WMD-related security and general positions of states in the region on the negotiation and outcome of a ME WMDFZ process have changed very little since the inception of the idea of a nuclear- or WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

Other examples of CBMs that attempt to redress perceived past “flaws” in talks can be found in the essays by the authors from Egypt and Israel. These follow a pattern similar to the two states’ views on ACRS described above. The author from Egypt sees that discussion on CBMs should begin after some progress has been made in the meetings of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. Here the Egyptian approach, the author argues, is to ensure that some progress on arms control is made before CBMs are discussed in order to avoid a situation where the CBMs advance further and become a stand-alone process that may or may not feed into the arms control process, as was the case during ACRS. According to the author from Israel,

however, this corresponds to his country’s preference as he argued that CBMs are of “real value in themselves, and may indeed contribute, in turn, to regional security cooperation”,²³ which, according to the author, is seen by Israel as a prerequisite for arms control or disarmament talks.

TREATIES OR RESOLUTIONS THAT INCLUDE STRICT VERIFICATION AND ENFORCEMENT MEASURES

The second type of approach attempts to address lack of participation and mistrust related to compliance and enforcement with the future zone by imposing legally binding commitments and guarantees. One way of doing so is through proposing resolutions that would include positive security assurances to guarantee the security of states, coupled with negative incentives to deter and punish those that do not join the zone or fail to comply with their obligations under its treaty. The author from Saudi Arabia, for example, calls for a United Nations Security Council resolution “whereby the permanent members of the Security Council bolster incentives for states in the region through guaranteeing a nuclear security umbrella for joining states; rewarding the states that join the ME WMDFZ with economic and technical support; and sanctioning those that refuse to join”.

Other such guarantees relate to the structure of the treaty through proposing strict verification, compliance and enforcement measures that are meant to alleviate the mistrust among the states. For example, the author from Egypt argues that one way to address the difficulty of enforcing arms control treaties would be through a stringent verification regime that would be multi-layered (international and regional), with a combination of measures from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the IAEA Additional Protocol.²⁴

Several authors see the need for extraregional oversight and guarantees to ensure compliance. For example, the author from Palestine argues that the ME WMDFZ treaty should provide for “some sort of international monitoring with the aim of ensuring respect and compliance with the commitments that it contains. International oversight could also involve ensuring that countermeasures, penalties

²³ Eran Lerman, “It was a good idea, it was a very bad idea: Israel’s incentives and disincentives in the Middle East WMD-free zone process,” in *Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the ME WMDFZ: Voices from the Region*, eds. Tomisha Bino, James Reville and Chen Zak Kane (Geneva: UNIDIR) 2022.

²⁴ John Carlson, “Nuclear Verification in a Middle East WMD Free Zone,” Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR. 2021.

and sanctions are imposed on ME WMDFZ members that violate their obligations.” The author from the United Arab Emirates also stressed the importance of international involvement, “especially in ensuring compliance and taking advantage of the experience of international organizations to promote transparency and information sharing and to create the right environment for cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear, chemical, and biological technology and research.”

ROLE OF EXTRAREGIONAL STATES OR ENTITIES

The role of extraregional actors in the ME WMDFZ is a common theme in both the actual process and the essays in this collection. The role envisaged for these states or entities falls into four categories: facilitation, creation, enforcement or providing guarantees.

The author from Egypt suggests that the P5 states could facilitate “regional discussions among a limited group of states on a CBM agenda”, but only after “sufficient progress” has been achieved at the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. A similar suggestion is made by the author from Iran, which proposes a “process convened by the United Nations Secretary-General that makes the security structure in the region its focus”. Unlike the author from Egypt, the author from Iran, envisages such a process as preceding or subsuming the ME WMDFZ process. The author from the United Arab Emirates also argued that the ME WMDFZ process should continue to take place under international auspices to ensure the continuity of regional consensus, a statement that also includes elements that fall under the categories of *enforcement* and *providing guarantees*. International oversight and monitoring are also mentioned by the author from Palestine, as mentioned above.

The author from Saudi Arabia even suggests that extraregional actors create a ME WMDFZ. It proposes that the Security Council takes a decision under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter to “create a WMD-free zone in the Middle East”, in addition to positive incentive for states that join (such as economic and technical support) and sanctioning states that do not.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite changes in the political and security environment of the Middle East, it is clear from both the essays and the roundtable discussion that the WMD-related security concerns and general positions of states in the region on the negotiation and outcome of a ME WMDFZ process have changed very little since the inception of the idea of a nuclear- or WMD-free zone in the Middle East. In terms of process, the main disagreements relate to whether talks on a ME WMDFZ should be preceded by or subsumed under

Although the incentives identified by the authors outnumber the disincentives and missing incentives, this has not resulted in more active participation or progress towards establishing a ME WMDFZ.



regional security talks and whether they should take place in a regional or internationally sponsored format.

The failures of previous talks (such as the ACRS process and the informal consultation in Glion and Geneva in 2013–2014) and steps taken by states in the region (such as the introduction of decisions and resolutions in the United Nations General Assembly and the IAEA General Conference) have contributed to further entrenching these positions.

Although the incentives identified by the authors outnumber the disincentives and missing incentives, this has not resulted in more active participation or progress towards establishing a ME WMDFZ. The closer, qualitative look in the paragraphs above shows that, for some states, the incentives are outweighed by the disincentives and missing incentives.

All the disincentives identified by the authors from Iran and Israel for not engaging with a ME WMDFZ relate to security. The disincentives for Israel, as outlined by the author, all relate to its threat perception and the set outcome (i.e., a treaty) of a ME WMDFZ process. The author from Israel argues that his country's scepticism about other states' compliance and the effectiveness of enforcement of international treaties and mechanisms; active threats against it by some states in the region; and the resulting conviction of the Israeli government that the country's nuclear ambiguity has safeguarded its national security all make membership of a disarmament treaty appear unattractive and perhaps even dangerous at this point. The author from Israel also argued in addition to the security disincentives, that in the case of his country, changing

Israel's deterrence posture also includes a reputational risk, as noted above.

Iran's disincentives, as outlined in the essay, relate to both process and outcome. On process, the author from Iran argues that the scope of the ME WMDFZ is too narrow, in both geography and topic, and does not address enough of Iran's regional security concerns. On outcome, Iran would consider any possible limitation on its missile programme – something it considers as a pillar of its defence strategy – as a threat to its national security.

As for the incentives or missing incentives, they are either of secondary nature (such as economic growth due to enhanced regional security, or stability due to the establishment of a ME WMDFZ) or could be achieved by other means (such as the establishment of regional talks related to broader regional security). Nevertheless, it is important for negotiators of a ME WMDFZ treaty to take these secondary incentives into account and attempt to clarify how they could be addressed and amplified through the zone. Deeper conceptual clarity on key issues such as obligations, prohibitions, verification and implementation, as well as what states can expect from a ME WMDFZ negotiation and resulting treaty will be crucial for securing and sustaining the engagement of states in the region and increase chances for progress.

All the authors agree that a ME WMDFZ is not to be expected to address all the security concerns of the region, and as an arms control and disarmament measure it is not intended to. However, they also agree that its pursuit can create many opportunities for sorely needed dialogue to address the sources of mistrust in the region, whether preceding the negotiation and establishment of a ME WMDFZ treaty, or in parallel to it. The appetite for dialogue that is apparent in all the essays should inspire hope for progress, which in turn could help create higher incentives for engagement.

Deeper conceptual clarity on key issues such as obligations, prohibitions, verification and implementation, as well as what states can expect from a ME WMDFZ negotiation and resulting treaty will be crucial for securing and sustaining the engagement of states in the region and increase chances for progress.

ALGERIA

PREVENTING WMD THREATS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA AND THE SAHEL

ARSLAN CHIKHAOUI





INTRODUCTION¹

Algeria neither pursues nor possesses nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and is party to or signatory of all relevant treaties on weapons of mass destruction (WMD), including the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention, and the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Algeria actively participates in these treaty arrangements. For example, Ambassador Abdallah Baali of Algeria presided over the 2000 NPT Review Conference, which agreed 13 “practical steps” for the total elimination of nuclear weapons.² Algeria further participates in wider efforts to prevent, combat and suppress the use of WMD by non-state actors within the continent of Africa.³ Moreover, the Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ramtane Lamamra, highlighted that “Algeria is fully committed to support all efforts aimed at achieving the objectives of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and building a world free of nuclear weapons” when he met Robert Floyd, head of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), in New York on 23 September 2021.

Algeria’s outsized contribution to WMD-related arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation is driven by several factors, including the country’s historical and political experience. These factors reveal multiple incentives for the creation of a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East and North Africa (ME WMDFZ), as well as in the Sahel region.

1 This report draws in part from Arslan Chikhaoui, “Algeria, CBRN Terrorism and WMD Non-Proliferation”, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, <https://nesa-center.org/algeria-cbrn-terrorism-and-wmd-non-proliferation/>

2 Ambassador Baali also served as Algeria’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations at the time (1996–2005).

3 See for example Nuclear Security Summit 2014, “National Progress Report: Algeria”, March 2014, https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/nuclearmatters/files/algeria_pr_2014.pdf; and Algeria’s approved 1540 Committee matrix, <https://www.un.org/en/sc/1540/documents/AlgeriaReport27July2020.pdf>

Following significant shifts in the regional order following the Arab Spring uprisings, Algeria's foreign policy has attempted to keep pace with and adapt to the changes in its regional and international environment. Notable steps that Algeria has taken to position itself as an international player include its accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Mediterranean Dialogue and the signing of an Association Agreement with the European Union. It has also further strengthening its reputation as a mediator in low-intensity regional conflicts, such as those in Mali and Libya, building on its experience of offering its good offices in the past to conflicts, such those between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq, between Iran and the United States of America, between Ethiopia and Eritrea, among others.⁴ Consequently, Algeria would be well positioned to play a facilitating role to prepare the ground for a successful ME WMDfZ process.

ALGERIA'S SECURITY INCENTIVES FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ME WMDfZ

The primary Algerian incentive for the creation of a WMDfZ is Algeria's national security, particularly the prevention of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism. These forms of terrorism remain a significant concern that no single state in the region can address alone. Preventing WMD terrorism requires coordination at international, regional and subregional levels, including potentially through a WMDfZ.

⁴ For more on Algeria's foreign policy, see Arslan Chikhaoui, "Algerian Foreign Policy in the Post-Pandemic Era", Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, 20 Aug 2021, <https://nesa-center.org/algerian-foreign-policy-in-the-post-pandemic-era/>

⁵ OPCW, Executive Council, Ninety-Fifth Session, Statement by H.E. Ambassador Lounès Magramane Permanent Representative of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 9 October 2020, [https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020/12/ec95nat73\(e\).pdf](https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020/12/ec95nat73(e).pdf)

PREVENTING CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL TERRORISM

Since the 1990s Algeria has emphasized concerns over chemical and biological terrorism.⁵ Reports suggest that Algeria has faced attempts at chemical and biological terrorism in the past. In 1994, a group identified as the Armed



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Islamic Group (GIA) – a violent extremist organization that subsequently affiliated to Al Qaeda – reportedly attempted to use botulinum toxin to poison the Meftah water tower and Keddara dam in the east of the capital, Algiers.⁶ In January 2009, various media sources suggested that approximately 40 Al Qaeda operatives had died in the mountains of Tizi-Ouzou province in eastern Algeria after experimenting with the plague-causing bacterium *Yersinia pestis*.⁷ More recent reports suggest that Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) continues to pursue chemical, biological and radioactive materials for hostile use, and has established training camps in the region, particularly in the Sahel area mainly in Libya and Niger, for the purposes of chemical and biological terrorism.

While the events reported above remain anecdotal, the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the power of biology and may lead to greater interest among actors in what is perceived as the “third generation” threat of bioterrorism.⁸ Moreover, like many other States around the world, Algeria has a growing biotechnology industry with an expanding network of biological, veterinary and agronomic academies and faculties undertaking research that could potentially be exploited for harmful purposes. Furthermore, national controls on sensitive biological (and chemical) materials are relatively weak and a complex undertaking. This is in part because chemical and biological terrorism has been seen as a lower priority compared to conventional terrorism in the past. It is also partly because Algeria shares 6,343 kilometres of porous land border with its neighbouring countries, which are difficult to protect.

The threat of chemical and biological terrorism is being addressed in Algeria through legal, regulatory and capacity-building measures. However, it is clear that this process requires coordination at the international, regional and subregional levels. It also requires enhanced regional capacity building and measures to support assistance and protection against these weapons.⁹ A WMDFZ spanning the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel would provide a framework through which coordination, cooperation and capacity building in these areas could be enhanced and consolidated.

NUCLEAR SECURITY AND SAFETY

Algeria has first-hand experience of the effects of nuclear explosions – it has suffered, and continues to suffer, from the effects of the French nuclear tests in 1962–1963 in the Algerian Sahara, in Ain Eker and Ain Salah in particular.¹⁰ Algeria has also suffered the consequences of radiological accidents. For example, in 1978, population centres around Sétif (250 km east of Algiers) were exposed to radiation when radioactive material used for gammagraphy “fell from a truck on the road from Algiers to Setif”.¹¹ These incidents are a reminder of the importance of preventing the development and use of nuclear weapons, as well as nuclear safety and security.

Recent reports suggest that Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) continues to pursue chemical, biological and radioactive materials for hostile use, and has established training camps in the region, particularly in the Sahel area mainly in Libya and Niger, for the purposes of chemical and biological terrorism.

6 This information, which can only be found in security forces documents, was not reported by media to avoid panic among the population. There are, however, other later sources pointing to attempted poisoning plots including by the GIA. See W. S. Carus, *Bioterrorism and Biocrimes: The Illicit Use of Biological Agents since 1900* National Defense University, 2001, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA402108.pdf>, p. 161

7 See E. Lake, “Al Qaeda Bungles Arms Experiment”, *Washington Times*, 19 January 2009; “Al-Qaeda Cell Killed by the Black Death May Have Been Developing Biological Weapons When It Was Infected, It Has Been Reported”, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 January 2009, www.telegraph.co.uk

8 In comparison to terrorist threats using home-made (first generation) or conventional (second generation) weapons.

9 As indicated in the Algerian statement to the Ninety-Fifth Session of the OPCW Executive Council, 9 October 2020, [https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020/12/ec95nat73\(e\).pdf](https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020/12/ec95nat73(e).pdf)

10 See variously International Atomic Energy Agency, *Radiological Conditions at the Former French Nuclear Test Sites in Algeria*, 2005.

11 This might refer to H. Jammet et al. “1978 Algerian Accident: Four Cases of Protracted Whole-Body Irradiation”, in *Medical Basis for Radiation Accident Preparedness*, 1980.

Nuclear safety and security are particularly important as Algeria has two nuclear research reactors for civil and scientific use. The first, the NUR research reactor, a 1-megawatt thermal (MWt) pool-type light water reactor, is located 40 km from Algiers. The NUR reactor is mainly used for “training operators and university students [and] conducting studies and experiments in physics and reactor technology”.¹² A second, the Es-Salam reactor, is a 15-MWt multi-purpose heavy water-moderated tank-type reactor located in the Birine Nuclear Research Centre, 200 km south-east of Algiers. It is “dedicated to the production of radioisotopes, scientific research, materials testing and training of technical and scientific personnel”.¹³

Both facilities are subject to the comprehensive safeguards and Additional Protocol of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Algeria has taken additional legal and regulatory steps to manage the risks attendant to a civilian nuclear programme.¹⁴ Nonetheless, concerns over radiological terrorism and accidents remain.

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

As long as there is concern surrounding CBRN threats, Algeria will spare no efforts to develop international and regional cooperation to address these threats. Particularly useful areas of cooperation include the following:

- The establishment of necessary legislative and regulatory measures to prevent and fight nuclear, biological and chemical risks and accidents;
- Exchanging experiences and sharing information to combat CBRN terrorism;
- Crisis management and capacity building in response to a potential CBRN terrorist attack;
- Raising awareness of the importance of the three “S”s: Safety, Security, Safeguards; and
- Setting up global CBRN forensic analysis and response capabilities.

While these may not be the primary focus of a WMDFZ, fostering regional cooperation in and around these areas of activity would be in the interests of Algerian national security and thus a potential incentive to further engagement.

POSSIBLE ECONOMIC INCENTIVES

In addition to national security incentives, there are also possible economic incentives to minimizing the threat of WMD in the region and bolstering regional cooperation and information sharing. Although the Algerian authorities have developed robust control measures, the Algerian energy sector has a number of vulnerabilities to terrorist attacks that could have a negative impact on hydrocarbon exports. The country’s hydrocarbon infrastructure – such as its western and eastern petrochemical zones, its oil and gas fields in the south (Sahara), as well as its oil and gas pipelines network – is a particular cause of concern due to the high concentration of strategic infrastructure and facilities. This infrastructure is an important source of revenue: as one scholarly report notes,

¹² International Atomic Energy Agency, “Research Reactors in Africa: A Directory”, 2020 edn, <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/20/07/research-reactors-in-africa-2020.pdf>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See for example the submissions under United Nations Security Council resolution 1540 from Algeria, <https://www.un.org/en/sc/1540/documents/AlgeriaReport27July2020.pdf>

“the income from [Algerian] oil and gas exports accounts for up to 30% of the country’s GDP formation, oil and gas exports pay for 60% of Algeria’s state budget, and 96% of the export revenues came from petroleum gas”.¹⁵ Wider cooperation on matters of regional security could go some length to protecting this infrastructure and points towards a possible economic rationale for closer security cooperation through a ME WMDFZ.

The availability of uranium deposits in the Algerian Sahara (at Timgaouine, Abankor and Tinef in the Hoggar area) further suggests that developing nuclear power plants remains an option among other renewable energy resources in the future. Despite the fact that it is a low-probability option, since 2007 Algeria has signed nuclear cooperation agreements with the United States, France and the Russian Federation and also renewed agreements concluded in the mid-1980s with Argentina and China.¹⁶ Algeria considers that nuclear energy must be available to all States as a means of development and progress in the scientific and energy fields. Efforts to stifle peaceful nuclear activities in the future would be a disincentive to participation in any mechanism.

In terms of energy policy, Algeria as a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has built an energy basket that relies on traditional energy sources such as gas, which is currently the main source of electricity production in the country (95 per cent). According to the Ministry of Energy’s public Electricity Development Plan 2021–2035, electricity production is predicted to reach 40,000 MW by 2035 and Algeria must prepare to transition towards electricity production from solar and wind energy sources. This means that the energy basket does not rule out the use of nuclear power.

POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD

In terms of future steps, regional information sharing, and exchanges could provide a useful basis for building relations across the region. For example, in late September 2010, Algeria set up a Regional Centre in Algiers, bringing together the States of the Sahel region to fight terrorism in all its forms by sharing information and exchanging experience on combating CBRN crimes, among other transnational crimes. This could be a model for wider cooperation across the Middle East and North Africa and beyond.

Fertile ground for productive exchanges and cooperation could further be created through developing links between communities, such as the scientific, business, industry, non-governmental organization (NGO) and non-governmental individual (NGI) communities, in order to build trust and confidence and to promote a culture of security and safety. In this regard, science diplomacy remains key to raising awareness and building regional capacity on nuclear and other WMD threats, on the importance of the three “S”s, and on disarmament and non-proliferation.

Wider cooperation on matters of regional security could go some length to protecting this infrastructure and points towards a possible economic rationale for closer security cooperation through a ME WMDFZ.

15 L. Tichý, “The Islamic State Oil and Gas Strategy in North Africa”, *Energy Strategy Reviews*, vol. 24 (2019), pp. 254–260, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esr.2019.04.001>

16 “U.S. and Algeria Sign Nuclear Cooperation Pact”, *New York Times*, 10 June 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/10/world/americas/10iht-nukepact.1.6074391.html>; “Algeria–France: Civil Nuclear Energy Deal”, *Africa Research Bulletin: Economic, Financial and Technical Series*, vol. 44 (2008), 17620C–17621A, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6346.2007.01314.x>; and “Talks on Algerian Nuclear Power Aspirations Begin Soon”, *World Nuclear News*, 29 February 2016, <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NP-Talks-on-Algerian-nuclear-power-aspirations-begin-soon-29021602.html>

EGYPT

A LONG-STANDING DIPLOMATIC INVESTMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST WMD-FREE ZONE

KARIM HAGGAG





INTRODUCTION

Egypt first introduced the issue of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East to the international agenda when it co-sponsored with Iran the 1974 United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) in the region. Ever since, Egypt has taken up the cause of regional disarmament as a central pillar of its regional and international diplomacy. The 1974 resolution marked the first in a series of Egyptian diplomatic initiatives that sought to address the threat of WMD in the Middle East.

Egypt's decades-long effort to advance the cause of regional arms control has been marked by significant milestones: its 1990 initiative to establish a Middle East WMD-free zone (ME WMDFZ); its active participation in the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) process (1992–1995); the diplomatic lobbying behind the adoption of the Middle East resolution as part of the 1995 indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and Cairo's subsequent forceful advocacy on this issue in the NPT review process; and its support for the convening of an international conference on the establishment of the ME WMDFZ. In short, Egypt's diplomacy has been integral to every major diplomatic process related to the issue of WMD in the Middle East.

THE ME WMDFZ AS A NATIONAL AND REGIONAL SECURITY IMPERATIVE

Egypt's diplomacy was based on the conviction that WMDs were becoming an increasingly salient feature of the security landscape in the Middle East, as evidenced by the creeping proliferation in the region over the course of the last half century: Iraq's extensive WMD programme, which was exposed in the wake of the First Gulf War; Libya's fledgling WMD programme, which was dismantled in 2003 under western pressure; the Syrian Arab Republic's long-standing attempts to establish an undeclared nuclear reactor (reportedly with assistance from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) and its retention of the world's largest arsenal of chemical weapons until its 2013 accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) after the repeated use of these weapons in the Syrian civil war; and the Islamic Republic of Iran's sophisticated nuclear programme encompassing the entire nuclear fuel cycle, which has brought Iran close to the status of a nuclear threshold state. All these developments have unfolded in the shadow of Israel's undeclared nuclear weapon capability, dating back to the early 1970s, which makes it the first case of horizontal proliferation outside the context of the five nuclear weapon states recognized under the NPT.

The threat of WMD proliferation factored into Egypt's long-term security calculus based on three main considerations. First, the proliferation of WMD capabilities accentuated the imbalance in regional military capabilities. Israel's nuclear weapon capability is the most glaring manifestation of this imbalance, but hardly the only one. The many examples cited above of proliferation in the region all point to the reality that the perpetuation of military asymmetries propels the Middle East towards ever higher levels of militarization, including proliferation in almost every category of WMD.

Second, WMD figured more prominently in the region's armed conflicts and arenas of regional security competition, many of which have involved Egypt directly and indirectly: the Iran–Iraq War; the First Gulf War; the Arab–Israeli conflict; the security of the Arab Gulf states; and Libya, which constitutes Egypt's western strategic depth.

Finally, in the absence of a viable regional arms control process, these repeated proliferation challenges have been dealt with almost exclusively through the use of military force or coercive diplomacy.¹ Not only has this repeated resort to military counterproliferation and the threat of force failed to address the region's non-proliferation challenge, it also continues to pose an ever-present threat to regional stability.

For Egypt, this escalating trend towards proliferation in the region has constituted a manifold and growing security threat. Egypt's security policy has traditionally been predicated on the linkage between its national security interests and the broader regional security environment. It was this linkage that prompted a deep sensitivity to the threat posed by WMD proliferation in the region, both to Egypt's

1 Examples of military force include Israel's bombing of Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981; the United States-led coalition against Iraq in 1991; Israel's 2007 bombing of Syria's nuclear reactor at al-Kibar; and the repeated targeting of Iran's nuclear complex through cyberattacks and the threat of force. Examples of coercive diplomacy include Iraq's forced disarmament under UNSCOM supervision after the First Gulf War; Libya's decision to relinquish its WMD programmes in 2003; and Syria's 2013 accession to the CWC.

national security and to overall regional stability. The origins of Egypt's 1990 expanded zone proposal clearly reflected this linkage. The lead up to the First Gulf War in 1991, in which Iraq and Israel traded threats and counter-threats involving the use of WMD, was a clear harbinger of the confluence of these weapons with the region's escalating conflicts.

The urgency of addressing this persistent and growing challenge to regional security was the driving factor behind Egypt's diplomatic activism. Egypt's approach in this regard rested on three fundamental tenets: The first was to link the Middle East to the global non-proliferation regime primarily through achieving the universality of the NPT. This, in turn, required Israel's adherence to the treaty as a non-nuclear weapon state, it being the only possessor of nuclear weapons in the region. The third tenet was a comprehensive treaty-based regional framework based on mutual reciprocal obligations and a multilayered verification system that combines both regional and international verification that would address all categories of WMD. This comprehensive approach would enhance the security of all states in the region, including Israel, while achieving "regional security at the lowest possible level of armaments and military forces".²

Not only repeated resort to military counterproliferation and the threat of force failed to address the region's nonproliferation challenge, it also continues to pose an ever-present threat to regional stability.

TAKING STOCK: MUCH LESS THAN A GLASS HALF-FULL

Looking back at the record of the endeavours, the return on Egypt's decades-long diplomatic investment is decidedly mixed. Perhaps the most significant accomplishment is that Egypt's proposal for establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East – its signature initiative in this regard – has now been unanimously adopted by the international community as the ultimate reference for diplomatic efforts to address the proliferation challenge in the region. Moreover, after repeated attempts to establish a sustained negotiating process to achieve this objective, there exists today a United Nations General Assembly-mandated international conference under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General.

Notwithstanding Egypt's success in internationalizing the zone process, the progress to date towards realizing the WMDFZ objective has been limited if not meagre. Far from adopting the comprehensive framework at the core of Egypt's vision, many of the efforts of the international community to stem the tide of regional proliferation have been guided by an ad hoc, piecemeal approach, focusing on individual proliferation problems on a case-by-case basis. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme is only the most recent example.

The primary obstacle, however, to achieving meaningful progress on the WMDFZ concept has been Israel's deep-seated aversion to engaging in any form of regional or international disarmament process. Instead, it insists on the need for a full peace with its neighbours before contemplating any steps in this

² This specific formulation has been a core element of Egypt's position as articulated by Nabil Fahmy, Egypt's former foreign minister and lead negotiator in the ACRS talks. It was also agreed upon language in the ACRS draft final declaration. See Nabil Fahmy, *Egypt's Diplomacy in War, Peace and Transition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 116.

regard – an approach that has come to be referred to as the “long corridor”. While reaffirming its formal support for the zone, Israel’s position effectively renders it out of reach.

As a result, the Middle East has not benefited from a sustained arms control process. In the absence of any meaningful progress towards the establishment of the ME WMDFZ, the trend towards proliferation in the region has proceeded largely unabated. This is witnessed by the numerous proliferation crises that have beset the Middle East: Iraq (1991–2003); Libya (2001), Syria (2007, 2013–2014), and Iran (since 2000), all of which have been addressed either by diplomatic coercion or the use of military force.

THE CHALLENGE OF INCENTIVIZING OTHERS

Having committed to the zone idea based on a clear national security concept focused on the threat of WMD, Egypt’s challenge has been to incentivize others, in particular Israel, to engage in a serious arms control process. The core concept behind Egypt’s WMDFZ proposal is the need to achieve greater levels of security for all states in the region by reducing and eventually eliminating the threat posed by WMD. Israel’s policy, however, is predicated on an approach which stands in diametric opposition to this logic: it is precisely the imperative of maintaining a state of overwhelming military imbalance in its favour, including its nuclear monopoly, that has driven Israel’s aversion to practical steps towards establishing the zone.

Egypt has long recognized the challenge of addressing Israel’s security concerns in order to incentivize its constructive engagement in the WMDFZ process. Expanding the scope of the zone concept to include a prohibition on all WMD, rather than just nuclear weapons, was a significant step in this direction. During the ACRS process, Egypt engaged in negotiations on regional confidence-building measures (CBMs) – a priority issue for Israel. It was the lack of progress on any meaningful arms control agenda that led to the collapse of the process in 1995. Israel’s adamant refusal to address the nuclear issue in particular frustrated Egypt and resulting in its decision to take the issue up in the upcoming 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference.

More recently, as part of the 2013–2014 informal consultations in Glion and Geneva convened by the United Nations-designated facilitator for the international conference on the WMDFZ and the three NPT depository states, Egypt sought to reconcile Israel’s insistence on a regional security-first approach with the objective of launching substantive negotiations on the zone proposal. In order to facilitate the convening of the first session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction in 2019, Egypt stated its willingness to discuss the issue of regional security in the hope that this would provide sufficient incentive for Israel’s participation.



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That the conference took place without the participation of Israel (or the United States, with Washington's position on the zone increasingly aligned with that of Israel) is reflective of the inherent difficulty of integrating Israel into the zone process.

Having founded its national security policy on a doctrine of absolute security, Israel's position may ultimately prove to be irreconcilable with a viable arms control and disarmament approach to achieve the zone. This is not to suggest that Israel's position is the only obstacle in this regard. Iran's pursuit of a latent nuclear capability and the rising interest among several countries in the region in acquiring nuclear fuel cycle capabilities also constitute formidable challenges.

CHARTING A PATH FORWARD

In the face of these challenges, there is a clear need to rethink aspects of the zone proposal, in terms of substance, process and politics. The United Nations-sponsored conference process on the zone represents perhaps the most significant procedural milestone since the adoption of the decision on the Middle East as part of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. The United Nations General Assembly decision mandating the conference explicitly stated that "The conference shall aim at elaborating a legally binding treaty establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by the States of the region".³ As such, the conference process presents a rare opportunity for constructive dialogue to formulate the complex technical, legal, and institutional aspects of the zone proposal.

³ UN General Assembly decision 73/546, 22 December 2018, <https://undocs.org/A/73/49> (Vol. II), p. 23, para. (a)(ii)

CBMs could take the form of pre-notification of military exercises or cooperation on maritime search and rescue.

The declaratory measures could include providing transparency on fissile material stocks, reaffirming political commitments to the objective of establishment a WMDFZ, or declarations of intent to refrain from targeting nuclear facilities in the region.

The decisions by Israel and the United States to boycott the conference no doubt constitute a setback. However, Israel's voluntary absence need not prohibit the substantive work of the conference: the elaboration of a treaty framework on the zone. Even when it comes to the issue of entry into force of the treaty, the record of arms control agreements (including those establishing NWFZs) reveal that such processes can move forward without the participation of key states. The complex entry into force provisions of the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco establishing a NWFZ in Latin America and the Caribbean allowed the region's two nuclear rivals – Argentina and Brazil – to accede decades later. China acceded to the NPT despite the fact that it was not a participant in the treaty's negotiation. South Africa came late to the negotiating process for the Treaty of Pelindaba establishing the NWFZ in Africa – it participated in the final round of

negotiations after its decision to dismantle its nuclear weapon programme. These examples provide important precedents as to how the zone process in the Middle East need not be held hostage to the decisions of key participants, including Israel, in the hope that a future change in circumstance will allow for its participation.

In parallel with the deliberations of the conference, more work needs to be done to further develop and refine the conceptual aspects of the zone. Much ground has already been covered in this regard by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and numerous research centres, focusing in particular on the verification requirements of the zone. However, the zone concept presents a unique conceptual challenge. Unlike the existing NWFZs, a WMDFZ is without precedent in that it strives to encompass all categories of WMD, thus imposing a more demanding and comprehensive set of requirements. Noteworthy in this regard is the emergence of several informal initiatives that have addressed this challenge, most notably by a group of regional experts who formulated a draft treaty on the establishment of the zone.⁴ These and similar initiatives should be encouraged and supported.

No doubt, building confidence among states of the region to engage more constructively in the zone process constitutes a formidable challenge. The ACRS process provides an important precedent whereby progress on regional CBMs reached an advanced stage, even though they were not ultimately adopted due to the lack of any progress on the WMD disarmament agenda as a result of Israel's position.⁵ This highlights the importance of proceeding on both tracks in parallel, if not necessarily at the same pace. Should sufficient progress be achieved in the context of the United Nations conference on the zone (for example whether in the form of elaborating key aspects of the zone treaty related to nuclear disarmament and verification measures or in terms of a more constructive engagement by the United States in the conference process), this can pave the way for the launching of regional discussions among a limited

⁴ See the draft treaty produced by the Middle East Treaty Organization (METO) initiative, <https://www.wmd-free.me/home/draft-treaty/>

⁵ The ACRS process was organized around two "baskets": operational and conceptual. The CBM agenda was an important component of the operational basket and focused on such issues such as incidents at sea, joint search and rescue missions, pre-notification of military exercises, and the establishment of regional security centres.

group of states on a CBM agenda, perhaps with support from the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Such an agenda could include both operational CBMs and declaratory measures. The CBMs could take the form of pre-notification of military exercises or cooperation on maritime search and rescue. The declaratory measures could include providing transparency on fissile material stocks, reaffirming political commitments to the objective of establishment a WMDFZ, or declarations of intent to refrain from targeting nuclear facilities in the region.

Although present regional security conditions may prove to be less than conducive to this approach, two important developments provide a basis for cautious optimism: the prospective revival of the JCPOA and the Abraham Accords.

The resumption of engagement by the United States and the international community with Iran to revive the JCPOA is taking into account the regional security dimension.⁶ The approach of the United States Administration of President Barack Obama was to insulate regional security concerns from the P5+1 negotiating process with Iran over its nuclear programme – which elicited strong regional opposition to the agreement. In contrast, the assumption on the part of the foreign policy team of the new administration of President Joe Biden is that negotiations on Iran’s nuclear programme need to proceed together with a parallel track, however vaguely defined, that would address the regional security concerns of the United States’ regional partners. If such an approach does in fact materialize, it could potentially lay the groundwork for a broader regional conversation on the relationship between regional arms control and regional security, with each positively reinforcing the other, rather than being perceived to be in opposition.

The countries comprising the P5+1 and the states of the region should start to think constructively about how to seize the opportunity of renewed engagement on the JCPOA to shape the diplomatic process in this direction. A revived JCPOA that narrowly focuses on Iran’s nuclear programme can be a stand-alone framework resulting from an ad hoc approach to the region’s non-proliferation challenges; or it can be leveraged to engage in a broader, more comprehensive regional approach to address the WMD threat in the Middle East.

The second major regional development is the Abraham Accords. While it is still premature to assess the impact of the Accords on the cause of Arab–Israeli peace and regional security, the expanding circle of normalized Arab–Israeli relations can provide states of the region with a modicum of confidence that they can engage in at least tentative steps towards regional CBMs as well as arms control. In particular, it should provide Israel with greater incentive to engage more constructively on the zone process given that the Abraham Accords signal that the region has taken significant strides along the “long corridor”.

⁶ Daniel Benaim and Jake Sullivan. “America’s Opportunity in the Middle East”, *Foreign Affairs*, May 2020.



The opportunities lies in the United Nations conference process on the zone, in parallel with recent transformations in the regional security landscape, which can provide renewed incentive to states of the region and key international actors involved in the zone process to regain momentum towards realizing a ME WMDFZ.

The regional security and arms control agenda in the Middle East is currently in a state of flux. This will pose challenges but also present opportunities for the zone process. The challenges lie in that a continued lack of commitment on the part of states of the region, in particular Israel, and the trend towards creeping proliferation, most recently with Iran's continued development of its nuclear programme towards a nuclear weapon breakout capability, threaten to push the objective of a WMDFZ further out of reach, or possibly undermine it altogether. The opportunities lies in the United Nations conference process on the zone, in parallel with recent transformations in the regional security landscape, which can provide renewed incentive to states of the region and key international actors involved in the zone process to regain momentum towards realizing a ME WMDFZ.

The imperative of reversing the proliferation trends in the Middle East should be incentive enough for all countries in the region, and the international community, to recommit to realizing this objective.

IRAN

THE MIDDLE EAST WMD-FREE ZONE: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REGIONAL DIALOGUE

NASSER HADIAN





INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Iran has long supported the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East. In fact, Iran was the first country to promote the idea in the United Nations General Assembly.¹ The Iranian Government's position has always been that a zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East region is a desirable and beneficial objective to achieve and promote national and regional security. This essay outlines Iran's reasons and objectives behind this position, its perspectives on regional non-proliferation and arms control dynamics, as well as the drivers and incentives (or lack thereof) behind Iran's engagement with the proposal for a Middle East WMD-free zone (ME WMDFZ).

IRAN'S SECURITY PRIORITIES AND POSITIONS

At present, the United States of America is still the primary threat to Iran, followed by Israel. The concerns about Israel and the United States are due to their military superiority coupled with their threatening rhetoric against Iran, which Iran is then compelled to reciprocate, thus perpetuating escalation. The impact of this rhetoric should not be underestimated as it entrenches positions and limits both side's ability to manoeuvre without risking being seen as acquiescing to an adversary.

Other threats include chaos in the region including terrorism, the changing world order, and, in a distant fifth place, Saudi Arabia. That being said, the close security cooperation between the United States and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf complicates the latter's relationships with Iran due to the military superiority of the United States that is closely felt, not least as United States ships navigate the Persian Gulf. The threat of new nuclear-armed states in the region is not a pressing concern at the moment. This, however, is liable to change if one or more states in the region decides to change the status

¹ United Nations General Assembly, Statement by Iran to the General Assembly, 1857th meeting, 1 October 1970, https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/A_PV.1857_E.pdf.



The impact of threatening rhetoric by Iran, Israel and the U.S. should not be underestimated as it entrenches positions and limits all sides ability to manoeuvre without risking being seen as acquiescing to an adversary.

quo. Iran's policy for countering such threats has revolved around developing indigenous capabilities to respond and deter.

Iranian policymakers and elites argue that our presence is very much a defensive one. Iran is active in the region in order to establish an effective deterrence against Israel and by extension against the United States. Deterrence by its very nature is a defensive posture. Iran's current position in the region is not intended for the projection of power. Simply put, the guiding thesis underlying Iran's strategy is that a change of calculus (on the part of an adversary) will lead to a change in behaviour. By convincing these adversaries that Iran could have military capabilities – both conventional and asymmetric – that could inflict severe harm, it hopes to change their calculus.

INCENTIVES, DISINCENTIVES, AND MISSING INCENTIVES

There are several incentives for Iranian participation in ME WMDFZ initiatives. First and foremost, a credible ME WMDFZ would serve Iran's national (and regional) security interests by eliminating the threat of WMD in the hands of regional adversaries. This threat of WMD is not an abstract concept for Iran; Iraqi chemical weapons killed thousands of Iranian soldiers and civilians in the 1980s. A credible ME WMDFZ would reduce the threat of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons in the hands of regional adversaries or terrorist groups. Reducing this threat is clearly in Iran's national security interest.

A verifiable zone arrangement could also serve Iranian national security interests in the longer term by reducing the perception that Iran poses a WMD threat to the region. As mentioned above, Iran has a defensive posture in

the region with no aspirations to expansionist projections of power. However, the perception of an Iranian WMD threat has, nonetheless, strained relations with neighbouring countries. This threat perception could drive a destabilizing military build-up or stimulate investment in nuclear hedging by neighbouring states. Additionally, the perception of an Iranian threat may push states in the region to seek closer ties with the United States.

Active and serious engagement with a ME WMDFZ negotiation and adhering to the resulting agreement – complete with an effective verification mechanism that includes equal commitments and mutual inspections – could allay the sorts of concern that could stimulate a military build-up. This may also limit the neighbouring states' need to seek military cooperation with the United States against Iran, thereby reducing the presence of United States forces in the region.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE MIDDLE EAST AS A CONCEPT

Yet, this author believes that Iran also has disincentives for engagement with the zone concept "as is" today. Certainly, there are many valid reasons to explain why efforts to achieve the zone have been stymied. But this author would argue that by far the most important factor behind the lack of progress can be traced back to the very construct of the "Middle East". Thinking beyond geographical proximities or disaggregating the Middle East to correspond more closely to the security concerns of states could unblock the path towards progress.

The logic of the name and the delineation of the Middle East is a product of people who sat in Western Europe or in their ships, looking towards their east. The "closer" East was thus dubbed the Near East. Areas that were further afield were called the Middle East and Far East. Thus, the logic of delineation and naming was based wholly on the geographical perspective of those in the West, without any regard for security, economic, and cultural dynamics within the region.

As such, we should consider different theoretical frameworks that provide us with other ways of conceptualization that are not limited to geography. For instance, Barry Buzan's concept of security complexes can be employed to help us come up with an alternative definition and conceptualization that incorporates security dimensions in addition to geographical dimensions.² Indeed, to generate a truly realistic reflection of the interests of the countries of the region, it would also be necessary to include economic factors. For example, Iran's security is linked more closely with Pakistan and Turkey than it is with Jordan or Morocco. Sitting in Tehran, concern remains not only over countries linked by geography, but over security and economic factors as well. Continuing with the same conception of the region and the same approach – where Egypt continues to lead a zone process that prioritizes only its security priorities and which focuses only on the Israeli nuclear arsenal, or where Libya, Tunisia, and others rightly prioritize their own security and interests against or despite of Iranian interests – is unlikely to be fruitful. So, reconceptualizing the Middle East could prove fruitful.

² Barry Buzan, "Regional Security Complex Theory in the Post-Cold War World", in *Theories of New Regionalism*, eds F. Söderbaum and T.M. Shaw, International Political Economy Series, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403938794_8



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That being said, it is unlikely that Iran would formally push for such a change of the delineation of the ME WMDFZ. As the co-sponsor of the 1974 United Nations General Assembly resolution on the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East, Iran would not want to be seen as backpedalling on its support of the zone by introducing proposal that other states might see as undermining the process. Also, practically speaking, a new delineation would be tantamount to erasing all the milestones that the process has achieved thus far.

A SMALLER GROUP FORMAT FOR THE START OF TALKS

If we still want to retain the old concept of the Middle East at the operational level, it is more practical to employ a different format. Having a smaller group of countries negotiating may have a better chance of success. Practically speaking, it could be fruitful to start with a format that brings together countries that represent the main 'fault lines of regional security: Turkey, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

Rather than trying to forge a deal with the participation of smaller countries, smaller group negotiations could begin, potentially through Track 2 meetings before moving into Track 1 negotiations convened by the United Nations Secretary-General. The negotiations should have a focus that goes beyond a ME WMDFZ and looks at the idea of establishing a security structure that fosters confidence and transparency. Although this might seem like a much more ambitious task, the truth is that it is more likely to generate buy-in from those key states that have been only half-heartedly engaged in the past. Indeed, as soon as the discussion is framed around the establishment of a ME WMDFZ, excuses emerge as to why it is not possible and how many other matters and initial steps would have to precede it. A process convened

It is most crucial to begin a dialogue and to have a forum where we can disagree but that nevertheless give us the opportunity to talk, share, and understand each other.

by the United Nations Secretary-General that makes the security structure in the region its focus – defined in a way that does not follow the Western geographic delineation and includes economic considerations – would generate a more meaningful level of participation from Iran. Otherwise, the engagement would not be very enthusiastic, nor would the process be taken very seriously. Another benefit of such a smaller group format is that it could create offshoots on subregional arrangements or confidence-building measures (CBMs).

The advantage of having fewer countries at the beginning is only a practicality. In other words, being a part of this core group should be considered not as a privilege but as a burden of putting together an agreement that all can accept. For its part, Iran would be glad not to be part of the core group and to then have the choice of accepting or rejecting the potential agreement later, thus avoiding potential unwanted new obligations. However, it will be unlikely that an agreement forged without Iran (and by extension one it will probably not be able to accept) can meaningfully address security concerns in the region. The choice of “core group” states should be based on their capabilities and expertise on the issue; Israel is believed to have nuclear weapons; Iran is believed to be a threshold nuclear state; Egypt has been in the forefront of the diplomatic fight for a Middle East free of WMD; Turkey is known to host nuclear weapons;³ and Saudi Arabia has considered acquiring nuclear weapons as a deterrent.⁴

Lowering the intensity of threat rhetoric

Starting to talk about a security structure and which would then subsume a ME WMDFZ is a condition for conclusion of an agreement on the issue. Only by having a viable security structure can one conceive of Israel considering giving up its WMD, something that many argue is a prerequisite for a zone. It is most crucial to begin a dialogue and to have a forum where we can disagree but that nevertheless give us the opportunity to talk, share, and understand each other. If we first concentrate on and move towards having a security structure, we might find a more fruitful pathway forward.

A forum focusing on a regional security structure would create opportunities for the key states to speak directly to each other. In turn, this could help to lower the threat rhetoric. As noted above, this type of rhetoric, which is often intended for domestic consumption, only serves to further limit the ability of states to engage in a more cooperative strategy as this could be seen as losing face. Indeed, toning down the rhetoric could provide an important reputational incentive for Iran to engage in these talks.

Enrichment activities and missiles

Aside from the delineation of the zone and its narrow focus on security issues, Iran could have other disincentives from being part of a ME WMDFZ as currently constructed. These disincentives relate to the scope of the agreement.

³ “Turkey: Country spotlight”, NTI, 21 October 2021, <https://www.nti.org/countries/turkey/>

⁴ Ewen MacAskill and Ian Traynor, “Saudis consider nuclear bomb”, The Guardian, 18 September 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/18/nuclearsaudiArabia>

Although a final decision might not have been made yet, a provision banning enrichment would be unacceptable to Iran. However, given the proliferation risks associated with enrichment, Iran may be more open to discuss the issue in the context of a regional nuclear fuel cycle arrangement. This could be achieved through a joint venture with other states in Iran or elsewhere in the region.

Another issue on scope is the question of including “delivery systems” in any treaty on the ME WMDFZ. Some limitations on missiles could disincentivize Iranian participation. The Iranian experience during the 1980–1988 Iran–Iraq War demonstrated the importance of missile capabilities. Since the 1980s, Iran has developed a sizeable and significant missile arsenal that remains important to its security. While supporting a WMD-free zone in the Middle East may enhance Iran’s security interests, any restrictions on missile programmes will jeopardize Iranian security and serve as a disincentive to engagement in the WMDFZ project. Furthermore, Iran has already accepted obligations related to its missile programme as described under Annex B of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) and agreed “not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology, until the date eight years after the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)] Adoption Day or until the date on which the [International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)] submits a report confirming the Broader Conclusion, whichever is earlier”.⁵ It is unlikely that Iran would accept further obligations unless they are mutual and reciprocal among the states of the region, which would also include major weapon systems, and coupled with certain agreements with Western states.

The price of failed processes: the United States withdrawal from the JCPOA

A further disincentive is Iran’s experience in non-proliferation agreements that resulted in non-compliance by other participants. This has created a deep-seated mistrust of the commitment of adversarial states to such agreements. The withdrawal by the United States from the Iran nuclear agreement, the JCPOA, justifies this mistrust. The JCPOA was faithfully negotiated between Iran, China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Security Council resolution 2231 endorsed this agreement, which was fully observed by Iran, as documented in successive IAEA reports. Unfortunately, domestic political factors in the United States led the administration of President Donald J. Trump to withdraw from the JCPOA in 2018. European states, despite their verbal support, did not undertake any meaningful action to support Iran. For the foreseeable future, the experience with the JCPOA and action by the United States and European states regarding their commitments provides a significant disincentive for Iran to commit to any potential agreement – regionally or internationally. This disincentive exists not only for Iran, but for other states as well. In future negotiations, Iran might attempt to design agreements in such a manner that creates more interdependence and a more complex set of interests served by the agreement for all parties involved, so that defaulting comes with a higher cost and it thus less likely.

⁵ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, 20 July 2015, [https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/2231\(2015\)](https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/2231(2015)), Annex B, paragraph 3

POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD

Despite all the obstacles mentioned above, there are still several steps – some perhaps small – that could be taken by states, including Iran and others, to help move the process forward.

First would be the adoption of some phased CBMs initially involving friendly states before gradually opening up to other states. For example, Iran could grant special access to friendly states to certain nuclear facilities, technologies, and materials not normally available to outsiders. In the longer term, Iran could share scientific knowledge on peaceful uses of key technologies through the provision of scholarships to students in the region. Such a step might make an important contribution to building trust by inviting technical counterparts to observe certain technologies and to gain access – not just to scientists and experts, but also politicians. The knowledge shared through such measures could be an important incentive for cooperation, and moreover it could foster connections and trust between scientists.

A second useful step could be the development of CBMs and dialogue between Iran and neighbouring Arab states. The Islamic Republic of Iran would probably be willing to engage in a dialogue and CBMs around a range of issues with its neighbours around the Persian Gulf. Indeed, Iran would be unlikely to have objections – in principle – to an agreement such as a Gulf WMD-free zone, provided that such an agreement enhances the security of participating states and forms a basis for greater effort towards a regional WMDFZ.

IRAQ

THE IMPORTANCE OF MIDDLE EAST WMD-FREE ZONE: HEEDING LESSONS FROM THE PAST

HUSSAIN AL-SHAHRISTANI





INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is, at present, the most volatile region in the world. On several occasions in the past four decades, parties to military confrontation in the region either used or were on the verge of using weapons of mass destruction (WMD). It is therefore unsurprising that calls to create a WMD-free zone in the Middle East (ME WMDFZ) have endured. Yet these calls have achieved little progress.

Iraq's painful experience with WMD has convinced Iraqis of the necessity of clearing their country and the Middle East region of any WMD. In this essay, I unpack the different elements that contribute to this position and offer an Iraqi perspective on relevant dynamics in the region and their impact on the ME WMDFZ process.

IRAQ UNDER SADDAM VERSUS POST-SADDAM IRAQ

In Iraq, one should distinguish between two very different eras: the era of Saddam Hussein and the post-Saddam era. During the eight-year Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988), under Saddam's leadership, Iraq endeavoured to produce chemical and biological weapons. With the help of West European companies, Iraq succeeded in making nerve agents and mustard gas, among other forms of chemical weapon. In total, it is estimated that 3,857 tons of toxic substances were produced between 1981 and 1991. These chemical weapons were not only used against Iranian military and civilians but also against Iraqis in the town of Halabja on 16 March 1988, where almost 5,000 civilians perished. Although most of the weaponized chemical materials were destroyed under the supervision of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) during 1991–1998, hundreds of tons of chemical weapons and precursor materials remained at the Muthanna State Establishment, the main production facility for chemical weapons, when the Saddam regime fell in April 2003.

1 United Nations General Assembly, Statement by Iran to the General Assembly, 1857th meeting, 1 October 1970, https://undir.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/A_PV.1857_E.pdf

Saddam's regime also strived to develop biological weapons and had built a special research and production facility, Al-Hakam, for this purpose. In total, Iraq produced about 19,000 litres of botulinum toxin, 8,500 litres of anthrax and 2,200 litres of aflatoxin. Some field trials were conducted, but biological agents were not used in warfare.

The Saddam regime viewed nuclear, chemical and biological weapons as a means to both deter adversaries and provide Iraq with a longer arm to reshape the map of the Middle East, in order to gain control of oil fields in neighbouring States. It is important to note that the Iraqi programme to develop nuclear weapons was launched after Israel bombed the Osirak research reactor south of Baghdad in June 1981. Saddam may have entertained ideas of acquiring such weapons at the time, but the scientists at the Iraqi Atomic Energy Commission were only committed to such an effort after the attack on Osirak, as some of them have told me.

The horrors experienced by Iraqis due to the use of chemical weapons and the role that Saddam's WMD policies played in the devastation of their country in the aftermath of the Gulf Wars and the 2003 invasion of Iraq have necessitated that post-Saddam Iraq confirms its unwavering commitment to WMD prohibition. Article 9 of Iraq's new Constitution – in the drafting of which I had the honour to participate – forbids the development, production and use of WMD. Beyond the clear normative incentives, there is also a reputational incentive and a security dimension for such a decision. Enshrining a WMD prohibition in the constitution sends a strong message to the international community regarding Iraq's non-proliferation and disarmament commitments. Moreover, it solidifies Iraq's reputation as a changed State and member of good standing in the international community. The prohibition of WMD in Iraq also has a security dimension; specifically, it prevents WMD from being used as justification for military action again in Iraq in the future.

WMD IN THE HANDS OF TERRORISTS

Another security-related incentive for the prohibition of WMD is to prevent these weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists. In the recent past, Iraq has narrowly avoided WMD terrorism in what can be described as a lucky break. Shells and other ammunition filled with chemical agents were sealed in two bunkers at the Muthanna facility when UNSCOM left Iraq in 1998. In 2014, the facility was captured by terrorists of the Islamic State group when they overrun that part of the country, and they tried to access these chemical ammunitions. Although significant damage was perpetrated on the facility by Islamic State terrorists, they failed to retrieve any chemical warfare material.

The chemical weapon remnants in the two Muthanna bunkers would have degraded considerably since they were

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placed in storage in the 1990s. Nonetheless, these toxic remnants of Saddam's chemical arsenal posed a significant health risk. The Muthanna bunkers were finally cleared, and the poisonous chemicals neutralized in 2017 by the Iraqi Government. In this case, Iraq was lucky. However, such a grave threat cannot be left to chance. Instead, States in the Middle East should give adequate attention to this risk and put measures in place to make sure it never happens.

Saddam's legacy presents additional non-State WMD-related risks. In the ongoing conflict in Iraq, former officials of the Saddam regime used chemical laboratories in the University of Mosul to produce toxic agents when it was under Islamic State control. This is not a challenge unique to Iraq; it is a risk faced by all other countries across our politically unstable region. These States, including Gulf States, cannot shield themselves from internal instability. Moreover, many States in the region, including Israel, the Syrian Arab Republic, Libya, Egypt and the Islamic Republic of Iran possess or possessed different categories of WMD or the means to produce them. Some individuals in these countries may have access to materials or expertise that could fall into the hands of terrorists, as we have seen in Mosul and Syria. Unless States across the region are alert and responsive to the dangers of WMD terrorism, we could wake up one day to find that it is too late. Elimination of all such weapons and putting an end to efforts to develop or acquire them by any country or non-State actor in the region is of paramount importance for the safety of the people in the region and the security of the world.

DISINCENTIVES AND COMPLICATIONS

Whilst there are strong incentives for Iraqi participation in the ME WMDFZ, there are also disincentives and complicating factors. Two key issues, the question of Palestine and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme, are discussed below.

THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

Israel's arsenal of nuclear warheads, its refusal to participate in the United Nations-sponsored multilateral negotiations to eliminate WMD in the Middle East and its heavy-handed oppressive practices against the Palestinian people have historically been the main obstacle to reaching an agreement on a ME WMDFZ. This factor has driven attempts by both State and non-State actors to acquire WMD.

The resolution of the Palestinian question is essential for regional security and stability. The Palestinian people's just struggle and persistence in establishing their State would remain the core root of any conflict in the Middle East. The policies of some governments to normalize relations with Israel will not change the fact that the Arab and Muslim nations overwhelmingly support the Palestinian struggle. Without a settlement of this question, there will not be permanent

peace and stability in the region, thus complicating the prospects of a WMDFZ.

THE JCPOA AND THE WMDFZ

Iran's nuclear programme and its efforts to enrich uranium to levels beyond what is required to fuel power reactors have also been a source of concern for many in the region. The landmark JCPOA agreed by Iran with the five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany (the P5+1) was an essential step in promoting stability in the region, and it is a key Iraqi interest. The JCPOA also eliminated concerns over the ultimate goals of the Iranian nuclear programme, thus removing a further obstacle to the WMDFZ.

The withdrawal by the United States administration of President Donald J. Trump from the JCPOA in May 2018 created further instability in the Middle East. Iran will not feel obliged to comply with the limitations of JCPOA if it is not to benefit from the lifting of economic sanctions. As a result, this may drive other States in the region to endeavour to acquire military nuclear capabilities. The return of the United States to the JCPOA is an essential step to avert escalation and create more conducive conditions for a ME WMDFZ. Demands to renegotiate the terms of the JCPOA to expand its scope are likely to harden positions on the other side. Iraq strongly supports the declared intention of United States President Joe Biden to return to the nuclear deal.

POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD

It is clear from the paragraphs above that the road to a ME WMDFZ is not a direct one, but one that will require several other issues, big and small, to be addressed along the way. However, there are a few small steps that could facilitate and support the States of the Middle East along the way.

A first step would be a call on scientists from the region to reconsider their participation in WMD programmes by elaborating regional codes of conduct or other means to build norms among the scientific community.

Second, non-governmental organizations, such as Pugwash, should continue to engage in Track 1.5 and Track 2 discussions on regional WMD issues, provide advice and analysis, and act as a neutral forum to build trust and promote dialogue among States of the region.

Finally, to create further incentives for States of the region to engage with the ME WMDFZ initiative, provisions to offer assistance could be built into any future agreement. These could include assistance in chemical weapon destruction, a multilateral commitment to prohibit and prevent terrorists from securing dual-use materials that can be used in WMD, or perhaps provision of

To create further incentives for States of the region to engage with the ME WMDFZ initiative, provisions to offer assistance could be built into any future agreement.



assistance in the event of the use of WMD in any territory of the States parties. The latter could both contain the damage of WMD and demonstrate solidarity among the States parties. Given its experience, Iraq is particularly poised to help other States of the region in this regard.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Possession of WMD does not provide security to any nation as the military confrontations in the Middle East in the past decades have shown. Israel's arsenal of nuclear weapons did not prevent the 1967 and 1973 wars with its neighbours. Nor did Saddam's chemical weapons shorten the eight-year war with Iran. Similarly, the use of chemical weapons by warring parties in Syria has not ended the civil war.

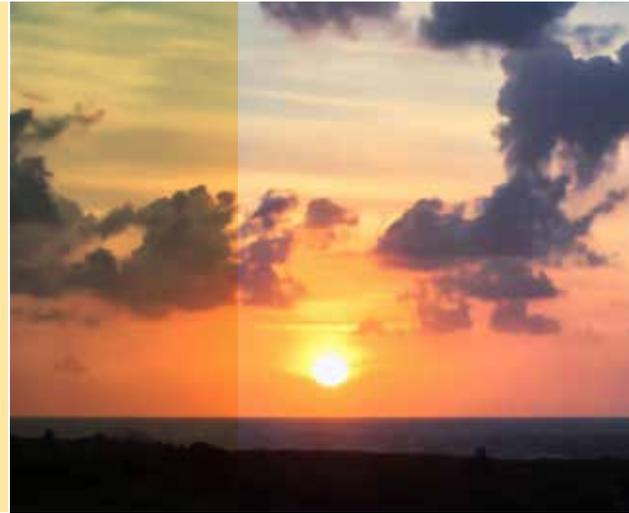
Governments in the region, the United Nations Secretary-General and the co-sponsors of the 1995 Middle East Resolution (the United States, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom) must work together to support efforts to this end. The status quo is not an option as it only pushes the region into more WMD proliferation. All States must seek cooperative security arrangements rather than WMD development.

ISRAEL

IT WAS A GOOD IDEA, IT WAS A VERY BAD IDEA: ISRAEL'S INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES IN THE MIDDLE EAST WMD-FREE ZONE PROCESS

ERAN LERMAN





INTRODUCTION

In 1992–1994, when Israel took an active part in the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) process, I was a member of the delegation, serving at the time as a mid-level intelligence officer. In 2013–2014, when Israeli officials engaged in the informal preparatory talks organized by the Finnish facilitator, Jaakko Laajava, I did not participate but served at the time as Deputy National Security Adviser for Foreign Affairs, and thus was aware of Israeli policy decisions. The following comments are my personal reflections on these experiences.

My basic insight is that Israel confronted – and successfully met – the challenge of managing contradictory imperatives. For my title here, I chose a paraphrase of the opening line of Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*. Perhaps more to the point, F. Scott Fitzgerald has famously offered us the definition of a first-rate intelligence: “the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function”.

In the case of Israel and regional negotiations on a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) or a zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), one such idea – held firmly by Israelis across most of the political spectrum (bar the far left) and entrenched at the highest levels of government – is that any actual disarmament would give rise to an existential threat to Israel. Until the day comes in which the region and the world are very different from what they are now, it would amount to exposing the nation (again!) to the threat of annihilation. This is not merely the fearful fantasy of a traumatized Jewish people: this is still the declared goal of significant forces in the region. A day may come when this will no longer be the case: but Isaiah’s vision of peace is not a policy guidance (or, as Woody Allen put it, “Someday the lion is going to lie down with the lamb, but the lamb isn’t going to get much sleep”).

True, other regional players may latch on to the same arguments and seek a military nuclear capability using Israel’s ambiguous stance as a template: but the pursuit of such an option would have been a prospect even if Israel was never there (the Islamic Republic of Iran has Pakistan as a nuclear neighbour;



For many countries, the creation of mechanisms of inspection are in themselves of value. But Israel has long ago learned that it has no need of them to be aware of WMD activities in hostile powers.

Turkey has the Russian Federation to worry about). Thus, the utility of Israel's persistent posture far outweighs the "cost" of providing others with excuses. The other, contradictory idea is that Israel nevertheless does have the capacity to act in the diplomatic realm. Specifically, accepting engagement (in e.g. the ACRS process, the informal consultations in Glion and Geneva, Barack Obama's non-regional Nuclear Security Summits, or votes in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)) proved to be necessary and even useful. Such diplomatic efforts are not just an exercise in avoiding blame. At least in the ACRS process, as part of a broader multilateral process, it was demonstrated that they can produce specific confidence-building measures (CBMs), which were deemed to be of value by Israel and several of its Arab interlocutors alike.

DISINCENTIVES FOR DISARMAMENT: ISRAEL'S REAL AND PERSISTENT EXISTENTIAL THREAT

The necessary point of departure for any discussion of the prospects of Israel ever committing itself to any treaty on a Middle East WMD-free zone (ME WMDFZ) is the deeply ingrained sense that this is an existential matter. Across the political spectrum – with the possible exceptions of the Arab parties and the non-Zionist left – the sense is that our ambiguous deterrent policy and strategy are vital, in the simplest sense, to securing the lives of every Israeli, man, woman, and child. While unarticulated – due to the accepted norm that they are beyond public debate – they are also the rock-hard view at the highest levels of government. For example, both the Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and then leader of the opposition, Tzipi Livni, reacted very harshly to Obama's failure to prevent the agreement in the Final Document of the 2010 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to hold a conference on the ME WMDFZ by 2012.

As long as key players in the region actively seek Israel's destruction, the breakthrough in relations with others – such as the recent normalization agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain – does not diminish the force of this conviction. Au contraire, it proves that Israel's strategic posture made it an attractive partner for others in the region who face shared threats.

This conviction that Israel's ambiguous deterrent is of almost transcendental value for our survival is bolstered by five interlocking factors.

First, the vivid, still living memory of the fact that extermination is not an abstraction for us (or for others in the region: ask the Yazidis). This is annually – and for many, daily – enshrined in the memory of the Holocaust, even if those who lived through it are now dwindling in numbers. For many in Israel – even myself, third generation born and bred – it involves direct forebearers who have been murdered for no reason but for being Jews. Few nations, if any, carry this burden of history.

Second, there is a unique overt, explicit, continuous and often brutal threats of physical extinction by some of our neighbours (or nowadays, our non-adjacent regional challengers, most notably in Iran) to see us wiped off the map. It is hard to think of any other member of the United Nations that is the target of such threats.

Third, at the more practical level of national security, the accumulated experience of the Israeli defence establishment and intelligence community also adds to the disincentives, and to Israel scepticism of international regimes. For many countries, the creation of mechanisms of inspection are in themselves of value. But Israel has long ago learned that it has no need of them to be aware of WMD activities in hostile powers.



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In fact, Israel's experience was that time and again, it worked the other way around – Israeli intelligence informed the work of relevant international monitoring agencies. Moreover, when it comes to enforcement, the Begin Doctrine¹ (1981, 2007) proved much more relevant to our survival than any action putatively taken by international agencies. Hence the profound doubts about the utility of any international treaty to protect our interests, and the reluctance to accept a United Nations umbrella or monitoring role for future efforts in this field. Four times in recent decades, Middle Eastern signatories to the NPT – all, by their own statements, enemies of Israel – proved to be in radical breach of the Treaty; the lessons for Israel have been that international treaties and reactions to non-compliance can hardly be relied on unless backed by a credible military threat. Even when it comes to chemical and biological weapons, Israel needs to rely, above all, on deterrence (this was clearly the case against Saddam Hussein in 1991). While willing to contribute – an official of the Israeli Ministry of Defense played an active and constructive role in the deliberations of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in the Hague – Israel could not adhere to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) or the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC): their inspection procedures would have been a hindrance to Israel's position on ambiguity. But in any case, for Israel, the lessons of United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (on the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons), which Israel actively supported behind the scenes, are at best problematic. The fact that the use of chemical weapons by the regime was documented, well after full elimination was supposed to have taken place, raises once again lingering doubts about the utility of international agreements.

Fourth, and on a more positive note, there is reason to believe that the emergence of Arab perceptions as to Israel's deterrent capacity has contributed to peace and stability. It clearly had a role to play in the decision of some of our key neighbours, over the last few decades, to desist from the effort for our destruction in the battlefield. In some cases, most notably Egypt, they chose to sign a stable peace treaty with Israel. This causality can be deduced from the historical timeline, even if no Egyptian or other Arab leader would openly admit to it. True, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) began a long and futile effort to undo Israel's alleged nuclear capabilities. This was their driving purpose in the ACRS process and at Glibon.

Still, it is my subjective impression – from the ACRS era – that the Egyptian military, and hence the leadership, were never fully committed to this almost obsessive MFA quest.² For the current Egyptian leadership, the status quo is convenient, and any ME WMD-FZ treaty would threaten that status. Israel's deterrence provides Egypt with a real-world reason to avoid getting dragged into the blood and toil of wars against it in Sinai ever again.

Fifth, finally, and in some ways even more positively, it is Israel's strategic posture – one may add, in all its aspects – that has made Israel into an attractive partner for now openly avowed friends in the Gulf and Eastern Mediterranean. The visions of a warm peace that this breakthrough suggests – the images

1 The Begin doctrine describes the series of action Israel took over the years such as preventive strikes, sabotage and counter-proliferation measures to prevent its enemies from acquiring nuclear weapons. It is named after Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who in the wake of the attack on the Iraqi Osirak reactor in 1981 ("Operation Opera"), invoking aspects of the Jewish historical memory, announced that Israel would not tolerate the possession of nuclear weapons by a sworn enemy. In 2007, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert acted in the same spirit ("Operation Orchard") in Syria, but for reasons of expediency (for both sides!) this was not officially acknowledged until 2018. On Iran, Prime Minister Netanyahu has often stated that Israel would not allow it to acquire nuclear weapons, and on several occasions in 2010 and 2012 the military option was seriously considered (but not taken).

2 It is interesting to note that several key Egyptian diplomats, such as Nabil Fahmi (who led its ACRS delegation) spent time at its United Nations mission working on First Committee matters, which are much more in the "disarmament" mode than the "arms control" mindset favoured by soldiers.

of Israeli products prominently displayed as such in UAE supermarkets, which never happened in Egypt or Jordan, are almost magical to many Israelis – could perhaps, one day, mitigate the fears described above, if and when they become the regional norm. But for the time being, these regional transformative events manifested in the normalization agreements must be viewed as the result of Israel's place in the regional balance of power. Israel is viewed by these states of the region as an asset against both Iran's revolutionary and disruptive role and Erdogan's overtly neo-Ottoman ambitions. Israel's deterrence, in the minds of friend and foe alike, is a major aspect of this posture. Without it, Israel's "escalation dominance" could be cast in doubt, opening the gates to prolonged and bloody confrontations, north and south, which in turn would reduce our value as an ally.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

What, then, led Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir (the hardest of our hardliners) to publicly envision a NWFZ back in 1984? Why did he and later Yitzhak Rabin, who took over as Prime Minister in 1992, consent to participating in the ACRS process? Why did Netanyahu allow Israeli participation in the exploratory talks in Glicon and Geneva in 2013–2014?

One reason is indeed "reputational". Israel is a member in good standing of the Liberal World Order (or was – not because we opted out, but because much of it seems to have fallen apart in recent years). In 1984, we were still eager to calm down the reverberations of our attack on Osirak in 1981.³ In Moscow, in 1992, when the five different working groups of the regional multilateral talks were officially launched (including the ACRS working group, as well as groups on economic development, the environment, refugees, and water), Israel perceived it as "buying our tickets" to a bright new world.

³ Given the belated applause for "Opera" in the decades after the 1991 war, it is easy to forget that even the Reagan Administration was highly critical at the time and suspended the delivery of F-16s to Israel.

In the wake of the massive, transformative events of the early 1990s – Saddam's resounding defeat and the collapse of the Soviet Union – the bilateral and multilateral tracks, following the Madrid peace summit, led among other things to Israeli diplomatic relations with Russia, China, and India, and a revolutionary change in Israel's isolated standing in the world. In Glicon, Israel found a way to engage with the Laajava process and avoid being in direct opposition to the NPT Review Conference resolution, much as the final document had angered Israel at the time.

Still, it was not without effort that the small "epistemic community" of Israeli arms control professionals managed to persuade their highly sceptical political decision makers that the risk of engagement could be taken and that the benefits would exceed the risks. To some extent, their ability to engage reflected an element

It is Israel's strategic posture – one may add, in all its aspects – that has made Israel into an attractive partner for now openly avowed friends in the Gulf and Eastern Mediterranean.

of reassurance that came from the pattern revealed in the IAEA votes on the “Israeli nuclear capabilities” resolution. The world, or much of it, understands why Israel cannot be compelled to risk its physical survival, unless very different political conditions come to prevail in our region – and beyond it. The proof comes (or used to come, before the Egyptian MFA gave up) in the “Israeli nuclear capabilities” vote at the IAEA General Conference plenary: how often does Israel win a vote in international forums? These results indicate an innate understanding that coercing Israel on this matter is neither possible nor wise for regional stability, and nor does it bring any of their desired results. Thus, when engaging in arms control diplomacy, Israel does not need to fear that one wrong step would immediately put us on a long, dangerous slippery slope.

Instead, if we are to suggest a different architectural image, we may be able to construct a well-designed and longer process. This may or may not lead to the ultimate goal and vision: a comprehensive and true regional peace in which one day we can shed our present fears and concerns. But along the way, other doors may open, and good things can happen if our diplomacy is sophisticated enough (and I will dare say that it was in the ACRS process, having been a very junior member of the team).

Such doors in the process may involve CBMs (or, as the joke goes, “conference-building measures”) of various sorts. These are of real value in themselves, and may indeed contribute, in turn, to regional security cooperation. As we prepared for the ACRS talks – and I should note, in passing, that the deliberation of ACRS Steering Committee were probably the most methodical and harmonious intergovernmental process I have encountered in my years in government – our choices were based on the Helsinki model and to some extent on CBMs adopted by India and Pakistan.

We gradually learned in the ACRS working group that this would be welcomed not only by Israel but by others in the region. Indeed, a number of Arab countries grew to resent the Egyptian MFA’s counterproductive approach and to appreciate the benefits, to them and to us alike, of progress towards the institutionalization of mutual notifications on military exercises; of working together on maritime search and rescue; and of creating subregional centres for security cooperation in response to common threats and local emergencies. One could add that today we witness the prospect of re-defining the region. In recent years, decision makers in Israel (and in Egypt) have started to think in terms of a community of like-minded Eastern Mediterranean nations, rather than “the Middle East” (a linguistic relic of the colonial era, when the region was defined by its location and distance from the perspectives of London and Paris). Israel, Greece, Cyprus and Egypt – backed by both the UAE and France – enhance their cooperation. The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) – recently recast as a regional organization – expands its mission beyond energy cooperation. Amidst all this, some of the ACRS confidence- and security-building measures may again come handy.

THE ULTIMATE INCENTIVE: CAN THE ACRS MODEL BE REVIVED?

The process can thus be rebuilt if all of the above is taken into consideration. Given all that has happened in 2020 and 2021, it should be within the realm of human ingenuity to revive the multilateral discussions possibly but not necessarily as a corollary to the resumption of bilateral talks. It can perhaps be done with a broader range of working groups to reflect today's challenges, such as working groups on health given the experience with COVID-19, education, de-radicalization, women's rights and more.

An ACRS-type group could be part of such a region-wide effort, as long as the process is long, sturdy, non-slippery, and, as suggested above, has enough doors opening along the way. But what is the ultimate goal at the end of it? Here, all options need to remain open so as to allow all the relevant players to engage, while accepting that Israel's concerns are real. It should be made clear from day one that there is no intention to delude or deceive anyone: no promises or even hints of promises can be made at this point in time.

To make this happen, two elements of the formula must be the key: first of all, Israel must be fully reassured that the choice, when the day comes, will be its and its alone. At least one country – the United States – has repeatedly given us this reassurance, but all of our relevant interlocutors must sign on to it if the process is to begin. Moreover, it should be clearly stated and understood that, unless and until all regional powers are at the table and willing to deal with Israel as a legitimate equal, the one last door will remain barred.

PALESTINE

NEGOTIATING SECURITY: THE CASE FOR PALESTINIAN MEMBERSHIP OF THE MIDDLE EAST WMD-FREE ZONE

HIBA HUSSEINI





INTRODUCTION

The formidable political, security and existential challenges that the emerging State of Palestine faces are insurmountable in the near-to-medium term. As Palestine considers all its options for realizing its long-standing desire for political and sovereign independence, it is also assessing its regional and global duties and responsibilities. One such critical geostrategic issue is engagement with the Middle East weapons of mass destruction-free zone (ME WMDFZ) process.

PALESTINE'S INCENTIVES

Palestine's engagement with the ME WMDFZ would be in line with its national interest and would serve to solidify its reputation as a member of good standing in the international community. As a new State, Palestine bears a responsibility to present itself as a peaceful nation that rejects all forms of violence and adheres to global rules embracing peace and promoting regional and international cooperation. As such, it seeks to be a free State that places restrictions on all forms of aggression and war. It will create national disincentives in order to make war, including civil war, unattractive. This will go a long way to support its stance on limiting arms and militarization, and on preventing the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), be it chemical, nuclear or biological. In turn, this will support and foster open diplomacy. Palestine has previously articulated such a stance regarding a zone free of WMD in negotiations with Israel, including at Annapolis in 2007. It will also aid Palestine's social and economic development and will constitute a net gain for its political reputation.¹ Earning such a reputation regionally and internationally would enhance Palestine's standing and support its de-militarization objectives. It would also pave the way for building new alliances with other States, regionally and globally.

¹ Based on the author's personal exchanges.

For many years, the overarching Palestinian aspiration has been a sovereign State free from occupation. Reaching independence through a negotiated permanent-status agreement with Israel remains key to achieving this end. This is despite the suffering of the Palestinian people, including dispossession; displacement; years of prolonged occupation; dehumanization; closures of internal borders within the West Bank and between the West Bank and besieged Gaza, and denial of access to Jerusalem; territorial shrinkage due to build-up of Israeli settlements; as well as the imposition of systematic, economic and financial hardship and restrictions on local and international trade leading to heavy reliance on international aid. Security needs are further fragmented by the geographical discontinuity and the Separation Wall imposed by Israel between the different parts of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, as well as the internal political Palestinian schism between Fatah and Hamas. The diaspora Palestinians add another layer of complexity to the security equation.²

Against this backdrop and to support its stance on non-violence, the most prominent incentive for Palestine to be part of the ME WMDFZ is its security. Palestine and its people have been constantly exposed to Israel's overwhelming and hostile military power. Israel's ardent emphasis on achieving maximum security for itself continues to trump that of Palestine. The security needs of Palestinians have not taken equal place with those of Israel. The undermining of Palestinian security needs, coupled with the extended occupation and the continued infringement of Palestinian rights and needs, have created a deep sense of insecurity and vulnerability.³ This will be difficult to overcome. Unless the conflict is resolved, the trauma and insecurity will persist.

However, Palestine understands that it cannot compete with Israel's military force; thus, its only remaining format to achieve independence and its own security is to be largely demilitarized. Joining the ME WMDFZ or any similar endeavour would further this goal and would give Palestine protection without undermining Israel's security. It would also act to deter Israel and hasten the implementation of any agreed solution.⁴ These are especially important given that Palestine and Israel "occupy a single strategic space"⁵ and the "scope for error would be very small considering the constraints of time-space",⁶ making threats against either of them a threat against the other. There are tangible examples of both this shared space and the possible threats against it, including shared water and electricity sources, and the Islamic Republic of Iran's recent attacks on Israeli-linked merchant vessels.⁷ Moreover, the limitations on arms imports and manufacturing entailed by a WMDFZ would mean that joining would add credibility to the negotiating position previously expressed by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) of Palestine becoming a "State with limited arms".

Notwithstanding the challenges, national security and protection against all forms of security threats internally and externally remain paramount. It is fundamental that the

2 Agha, H. and A. Khalidi. (2014). "Palestinian National Security". In M. LeVine and M. Mosseberg (eds.), *One Land, Two States: Israel and Palestine as Parallel States*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. pp. 94-95.

3 Yezid Sayegh, "Redefining the Basics: Sovereignty and Security of the Palestinian State", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4 (summer 1995), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2537754>, pp. 8-9.

4 Hussein Agha, Personal interview, 10 June 2010.

5 Hussein Agha and Ahmad Samih Khalidi, "Palestinian National Security", in M. LeVine and M. Mossberg (eds.), *One Land, Two States: Israel and Palestine as Parallel States*, University of California Press, p. 117.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

7 For a short discussion of the shared water resources, see Stephen C. McCaffrey, "Water Scarcity and Security Issues in the Middle East", *Proceedings of the American Society of International Law Annual Meeting*, vol. 108, 2014, pp. 297-300, <https://doi.org/10.5305/procanmeetasil.108.0297>

Given that Palestine and Israel "occupy a single strategic space" and the "scope for error would be very small considering the constraints of time-space", a WMD threat against one of them constitutes also a threat against the other.

State of Palestine, its people and their livelihoods are afforded protection against any potential threats and use of force.⁸ Achieving Palestinian national security involves protection against “the use of superior Israeli force in aggressive, preventive, coercive, or punitive actions; violence aimed at Palestinian communities abroad; threats from third-party conflicts with Israel, including the threat and possible use of weapons of mass destruction; assassinations, incursions, punitive raids, property damage, and home demolitions”.⁹

These security interests become even more pronounced in the light of the repercussions of the ever-decreasing chances of reaching an end-of-conflict settlement with Israel, including denying Palestinians the ability to defend themselves and the constant demands for Palestinians to demilitarize.¹⁰ The challenge for the State of Palestine would be dealing with these external factors and forces and finding security agreements with its neighbours. Joining the ME WMDFZ would propel such a safety measure and create a potential safety net. It would deter aggression by either Israel or third parties hostile to Israel, including the radical proxies of neighbouring regimes, which would by implication threaten Palestine’s security given the close proximity. Thus, importantly, Palestine’s incentives for joining would be weakened if Israel did not join. But overall, the ME WMDFZ could provide safety for the region as a collective over the individual State interest, and thus Palestine stands to obtain another net security gain.

Again, Palestine has no interest in posing an offensive military threat to any state but would rather maintain a self-defence capability in a largely non-militarized state. Such an interest has often been communicated during negotiations with Israel, especially during those concerning exceptions to Israeli military withdrawal from Palestinian territories (topics discussed include early warning stations, military presence in the Jordan Valley, use of Palestinian airspace and use of the electromagnetic spectrum). Given that it is unlikely that Palestine will, in the foreseeable future, acquire a military capacity that may be sufficient for its national security, the focus should instead be on building “a multi-tiered regime of psychological, diplomatic, economic and political barriers sufficient to protect Palestinian interests, and to dissuade any potential aggressors from the pursuit of their goals via the use of force”.¹¹

The non-military defence plank of a Palestinian security doctrine necessitates reaching binding commitments regarding use of and resort to force.¹² This plank may be facilitated, and its proper enforcement guaranteed by the international community. A ME WMDFZ treaty may be a good step in this direction. It would be useful if the treaty were to provide for some sort of international monitoring with the aim of ensuring respect and compliance with the commitments that it contains. International oversight could also involve ensuring that countermeasures, penalties and sanctions are imposed on ME WMDFZ members that violate their obligations. In such an event, this treaty could act as a strategy that raises the cost of developing or using WMD for non-compliant members. This strategy could be further strengthened by ensuring that non-compliance with the ME WMDFZ is condemned by the

8 A secure Palestine would also require that its borders, airspace and international waters are preserved, and access to vital resources and natural assets are maintained. Without guaranteeing these, it would be hardly possible to envision a secure Palestine.

9 Hussein Agha and Ahmad Samih Khalidi, “Palestinian National Security”, in M. LeVine and M. Mossberg (eds.), *One Land, Two States: Israel and Palestine as Parallel States*, University of California Press, pp. 100–102.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

international community and may therefore damage the reputation of non-abiding members, which in turn may have an adverse impact on engagement with these members on other issues. However, without mechanisms that ensure enforcement of negative security assurances, there remains a need to maintain some level of militarization and self-defence powers. As such, the ME WMDFZ treaty may need to tackle this in some detail for Palestine to consider joining. An indirect advantage here would be that faith in the ability of the international community to play a leading role in oversight and “policing” functions could be restored.

Moreover, participation in such a regional oversight framework would fit with relatively recent Palestinian moves towards internationalizing the conflict with Israel, such as by achieving observer status at the United Nations, a shift that Daniela Huber and Lorenzo Kamel have documented.¹³ Similarly, if other Arab States were to join a ME WMDFZ, this could boost Palestine’s relative power in bilateral interactions with those States, due to the further regionalizing and institutionalizing of these diplomatic relations, as has perhaps been the case with Palestinian involvement in the Arab League and United Nations. This could counter the effects on Palestine of Israel’s recent efficacious diplomacy with several Gulf states, including Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (formalized in the Abraham Accords).

Joining the ME WMDFZ treaty will pave the way to enhancing Palestine’s security by somehow creating “military power” symmetry. It may contribute to putting Palestine on a somewhat equal footing with other States in the region that possess WMD, and which may use them in a way that would harm Palestinians. It would, therefore, make it cost-effective and potentially easier for Palestine to enhance its security, and would enable neighbouring States to strengthen their security without endangering Palestine’s. This, however, will also depend on which States join the ME WMDFZ treaty. The chances of Palestine joining the ME WMDFZ would most likely increase if States that are believed or alleged to possess WMD join too. Moreover, for national security to qualify as an incentive for joining the ME WMDFZ, the implementation of several factors must be ensured so as to build confidence in the added value of the ME WMDFZ treaty. These include:

Credible measures to enforce treaty obligations and hold States that commit breaches accountable, possibly including:

1. the threat of sanctions and diplomatic ostracization;
2. a guarantee of proper enforcement through countermeasures, penalties and sanctions being imposed on ME WMDFZ members that violate their obligations;
3. effective monitoring of non-compliance, perhaps through a system of mutual inspections, similar to the aerial surveillance flights under the 1992 Treaty on Open Skies;
4. and penalizing them as needed.

Participation in a regional oversight framework would fit with relatively recent Palestinian moves towards internationalizing the conflict with Israel, such as by achieving observer status at the United Nations.

13 Daniela Huber and Lorenzo Kamel, *The Multilateralisation of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: A Call for an EU Initiative*, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), 2015.



Given the wide belief that Israel possesses nuclear weapons – although the Dimona reactor is believed to be ailing – as well as allegations that it has both biological and chemical weapon programmes, Israel’s signing of the ME WMDFZ treaty may have a positive impact on the everlasting Israeli–Palestinian conflict. This would be particularly noticeable with respect to the security and stability question, since it may function as a confidence-building mechanism between the two parties (it has been suggested that Palestine would be willing to discuss joining a ME WMDFZ before the resolution of its bid for statehood in the United Nations). This, in turn, may cause or influence a return to peace talks and negotiations, which may decrease incidents that incentivize violence and “justify” the acquisition or use of weapons. This would also help neutralize security threats and achieve a power balance among States with varying military capacities, while also maintaining the security of the States’ national interests and boundaries and securing more peace in the region. Furthermore, as Prince Turki Al Faisal has written in his essay¹⁴ on Saudi Arabia’s views, the durability and effectiveness of a ME WMDFZ, as well as other regional security regimes, would partly rely on a resolution of the Israel–Palestine conflict, as well as other regional issues.

All weapons, including conventional, chemical, biological, nuclear and technological, as well as other forms of warfare, constitute threats, even though their risks and threats are different. Palestine, being a small, defenceless country squeezed amid giant and potentially hostile third parties, has an incentive to join the ME WMDFZ. As such, it is not only a reputational issue, but a matter of survival and peaceful existence among nations.

14 Turki AlFaisal, “Preserving and Strengthening the Middle East WMD-Free Zone Process,” in *Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the ME WMDFZ: Voices from the Region*, eds. Tomisha Bino, James Revill and Chen Zak Kane (Geneva: UNIDIR) 2022.

POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD

For Palestine to meaningfully engage with and ultimately join a ME WMDFZ treaty, it would need to consider not just its adherence to international treaties, but also some national measures, such as formulating national regulations exclusively specifying peaceful uses of dual-use technologies and acceptable safeguards that ensure the continuity of peacefulness of such uses.

For a ME WMDFZ to contribute towards enhancing Palestine's national security, the negotiations and subsequent treaty would also have to take into account or ensure the following:

1. Identifying practical confidence-building measures, such as a system of mutual inspections;
2. Discussing possible and acceptable countermeasures and penalties that can be imposed on States that violate their obligations under the ME WMDFZ treaty; and
3. Including States that are alleged to possess WMD in the region, without whom the central incentive for Palestine's participation would not be met.

SAUDI ARABIA

PRESERVING AND STRENGTHENING THE MIDDLE EAST WMD- FREE ZONE PROCESS

TURKI ALFAISAL





INTRODUCTION

Over the last five decades, many regions in the world – Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, South East Asia, Africa, and Central Asia – have succeeded in establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZ). Despite decades of calls by regional and international actors for a NWFZ in the Middle East, tangible progress towards realizing this noble and vital goal remains elusive as stakeholders lack the necessary political will to move forward. If the states in more peaceful regions saw a need to eliminate the danger of nuclear weapons from their regions, then states in a conflict-ridden region such as the Middle East should feel an even more urgent need to do the same. Indeed, they should feel a need to go further by banning all other weapons of mass destruction (WMD), given the history of these weapons in the region.

Prohibiting nuclear weapons and other WMD is the only means to inhibit states of the region from seeking such destructive weapons even if justified as a means for deterrence. Therefore, establishing a Middle East WMD-free zone (ME WMDFZ) as a means to ensure that the Middle East is safer and more secure is the main incentive for Saudi Arabia to pursue this goal.

THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AROUND SAUDI ARABIA

Given that Iran – to an extent – justifies its nuclear latency as a response to the Israeli nuclear programme, the ME WMDFZ could be a solution to both. But this, so far, has been thought of in limited circles of the Saudi Arabian national security elites.

At present, Saudi Arabia's main security priority is the Islamic Republic of Iran, in relation to both its nuclear programme and its regional behaviour. Thus, the conversation in official circles in Saudi Arabia centres on Iran when it comes to WMD threats. However, that threat perception discussion is not linked to the ME WMDFZ process, which is not seen as a possible solution. Given that Iran – to an extent – justifies its nuclear latency as a response to the Israeli nuclear programme, the ME WMDFZ could be a solution to both. But this, so far, has been thought of in limited circles of the Saudi Arabian national security elites.

The security environment around Saudi Arabia has seen some important developments in recent years. An example is the rise in Turkey's capability to project power in the region, including its direct military interventions in the Syrian Arab Republic and Libya and its continued support of Muslim Brotherhood organizations in Arab countries, which has raised security concerns for several states in the region. It is safe to assume that Turkey will continue to play a more central role in the security thinking in Saudi Arabia if it continues this pattern of behaviour. The ME WMDFZ could create an opportunity for the states of the region to engage formally with Turkey on security matters. Given the country's current, more "Middle Eastern" orientation and the nuclear weapons stored by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) at Incirlik Air Base, it is inevitable that Turkey would need to be included in some fashion within the zone treaty. This does not imply a need to redraw the borders of the zone to include Turkey, but rather to find other means of inclusion, such as protocols akin to those for the five nuclear weapon states in other NWFZ treaties or by including it as observer state to the negotiation of the treaty and any follow-on process to implement it.

RISING THREATS OF REGIONAL PROLIFERATION OF OTHER WMD AND MISSILES

While nuclear weapons are clearly an important concern, currently chemical and biological threats are arguably more immediate in the Middle East, as chemical weapons have been used repeatedly in the region. The ongoing pandemic also highlights the scale of death and disruption that could be inflicted if pathogens were to be weaponized.

Another important angle from which to look at these threats was made apparent by the tragic blast at Beirut port in August 2020. It is conceivable

that an attack using a short-range missile could target a facility containing toxic chemicals (for peaceful purposes) and cause untold destruction. Such an attack could have consequences for several states of the region. The need for Iran's missile programme to be part of the ME WMDFZ discussion is highlighted by such scenarios as well as the possibility of this sort of attack being carried out by non-state actors sponsored by Iran or others. New thinking on these issues is necessary.

A STALLED PROCESS

Although the above paragraphs demonstrate why a ME WMDFZ would provide a valuable framework to address several ills in the region, the reality remains that despite more than 40 years of efforts, we are no nearer to realizing this goal today than we were then.

Among the key reasons for this lag is the limited awareness around issues such as the potential for more states in the region to seek nuclear latency or even fully fledged weapon programmes; the risks associated with peaceful programmes; the lack of trust among the main stakeholders; as well as an absence of will, especially by the nuclear weapon states of the UN Security Council. There is also limited awareness of the possible routes to address these issues through a ME WMDFZ process; or of the possibilities for regional dialogue or even cooperation that could be created by or during the process.

As discussed above, the ME WMDFZ is not part of the national debate in Saudi Arabia. But with developments in Iran's nuclear programme occupying more attention in all circles, there is an opportunity to invigorate debate on the ME WMDFZ by raising awareness nationally and regionally about the threats and, more importantly, the practical means by which we can address them. This can help give more concrete form to what is currently seen as a more abstract concept and enable members of the Saudi Arabian national security establishment to meaningfully engage. The ME WMDFZ is also seen more as an Arab concern, traditionally led by Egypt. Although there are benefits to the promotion of a unified Arab position, it is also in part why there is limited debate on this inside Saudi Arabia. Given that none of the 22 member states of the League of Arab States possess nuclear weapons and all have signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), their position is that they have "done their bit" to demonstrate their support for the establishment of the zone. Furthermore, the reality that the Middle East has lived with a nuclear-armed Israel for 60 years results in the sense – both internationally and regionally – that there is no urgency to address this.

It is conceivable that an attack using a short-range missile could target a facility containing toxic chemicals (for peaceful purposes) and cause untold destruction. Such an attack could have consequences for several states of the region.

In addition, without a just resolution to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, the question of Palestine will continue to complicate prospects for a ME WMDfZ, even if all Arab states normalized relations with Israel. It is not realistic to think that a regional security regime can be built among states where one continues to occupy the territories of another. It is still an issue that is important and is in the hearts and minds of millions of Arabs and Muslims across the region. Only with the equitable resolution of this issue can the way be paved for better regional ties with Israel and progress on any cooperative mechanisms.

The active engagement of Israel, as the sole possessor of nuclear weapons in the region, and Iran, as a nuclear-aspirant state, is crucial to the success or failure of the ME WMDfZ process. The failure of all previous attempts to establish the zone rests on the shoulders of Israel and the continued justification by the United States of America of Israel's position by upholding Israel's nuclear ambiguity, which is antithetical to the establishment of a zone.

The United States and Israel demand that others, such as Iran (and previously Iraq, Libya and Syria) adhere to the non-proliferation norm while they retain their own capabilities and while the United States drags its feet on fulfilling its obligation under Article VI of the NPT to fully disarm. This double standard has and will continue to cast a shadow over the process and undermine faith in the seriousness and viability of the effort. Compounded by the uncertainty and confusion in the region after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 as questions arose about the United States' dominance and its role in protecting the region, each



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country in the Middle East has come to view any security threat as an existential threat. Israel's insistence on preserving its nuclear ambiguity only serves to give more credence to these perceptions.

The pursuit of the ME WMDFZ by the NPT review conferences has been fruitless due to the United States' insistence on not embarrassing Israel for being the only country in the Middle East which has not signed the NPT. Even when the United States agreed to support a zone conference as part of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, and just as the agreed conference was about to take place in 2012, the United States declared its opposition to holding the conference. A more consistent US approach would aid in convincing Israel to pursue this goal in a serious manner. Israel, if it refuses, will have lost its main ally in keeping the status quo.

DRIVERS AND INCENTIVES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Saudi Arabia, like all Arab states, believes in principled common regional security structures that are based on respect for the existing national states, that encourage cooperation and coordination between states, and that preserve regional peace and security. Saudi Arabia's leading role within the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is aimed at promoting these goals. Saudi Arabia is also open for new arrangements if they lead to the creation of a new regional security structure that serves the end goal of achieving stability, peace and security in the Middle East. Within this context, Saudi Arabia, as well as other Arab states, believes in the vital need to establish a ME WMDFZ. As is known, no Arab state, including Saudi Arabia, is pursuing military nuclear capability, all are signatories to the NPT, and the vast majority are signatories to other treaties dealing with WMD.

Beyond the clear benefits for the region and the world of ridding the Middle East of WMD, Saudi Arabia also has concrete national security concerns that could be addressed through a ME WMDFZ. These relate in particular to the status of Iran's nuclear programme and its delivery systems. A treaty creating a ME WMDFZ may also lead to the creation of a forum to address the lack of trust and the need for honest dialogue among states in the region. Such a regional forum could create the space to address several outstanding issues, such as the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, terrorism and water scarcity, to name a few. Despite its reservations, Saudi Arabia had hoped that the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme could help pave the way for such a forum and that it would be the first of many steps that would address other aspects of Iranian behaviour in the region. However, Saudi Arabia became disillusioned with the agreement as it became clear that further steps were not going to materialize. On the contrary, Iran took advantage of this agreement to increase its financing of non-state actors and did not cease its interference in the internal affairs of its neighbours. In a sense, the JCPOA freed up Iran's hand to act more belligerently in the region. The fanning of sectarian flames

by Iran has been much more harmful to the security and stability of the region than its nuclear programme. More lives have been lost to this sectarian policy than to Iran's nuclear programme that further entrenches and legitimizes the revolution and its organs.

The 2015 agreement with Iran should not be seen as an alternative to the zone as the JCPOA would not prevent Iran from preserving its nuclear weapon programme and only postponed that probability for the duration of the agreement; 15 years from 2015, less than 9 years from the time of writing. It also allows Iran to enrich uranium to just below 5 per cent, thus allowing it to continue to acquire the materials and know-how to develop nuclear weapons. The ME WMDFZ must have stronger provisions that apply to all countries in the region and ban all activities that go beyond the rights of states under the NPT. Most importantly, the JCPOA provided no guarantee whatsoever that Iran will not embark on developing nuclear weapons once the 15-year period is over. A ME WMDFZ would help to mitigate that possibility by implementing stricter inspection and verification, combining both international and regional mechanisms, such as mutual visits and inspections.

In Saudi Arabia, it is the hope that the administration of US President Joe Biden will not repeat the mistakes and shortcomings of the JCPOA by attempting to return to the deal "as is" but will rather use the renewed negotiations to address additional important issues. An incremental approach such as returning to the JCPOA "as is" will trap diplomacy and allow Iran to further develop its nuclear programme in the meantime. From the perspective of Saudi Arabia, a non-comprehensive deal will not achieve lasting peace and security in our region. Any new agreement should encompass all issues of concern to friends and allies of the United States in the region. Otherwise, the Iranian nuclear threat will remain.

In the same light, Saudi Arabia views the Israeli nuclear programme as no less of a threat to the region's peace and security so long as Israel remains outside the NPT. Israel's policies justify the efforts of Iran and perhaps other countries in the region to acquire nuclear weapons in the future. Historically, the monopoly of such a weapon is never sustainable. This risk of such horizontal proliferation in the region should be an incentive for countries – including Israel – to abandon their nuclear postures and seriously negotiate a ME WMDFZ on an equal footing.

SMALL STEPS TO BRING CLOSER A ME WMDFZ

There is a dire need for clear, honest, and direct discussion of the issue and the aims, scope, and the obstacles a ME WMDFZ faces. Raising awareness of the issue in the Middle East is also crucial to ensure wider engagement from the governments and peoples of the region. States that have recently signed

normalization agreements with Israel – the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco – should leverage their relationship with Israel to also discuss the ME WMDFZ issue. Public statements from these countries and others could also help bring public attention to the zone.

A clear and honest dialogue at a subregional level could also support efforts toward realizing the ME WMDFZ by addressing tensions and mistrust between GCC states and Iran. In the past, the GCC had proposed to Iran the development of confidence-building measures, which could be modelled on the 10 principles of the Helsinki Accords. Such an approach would still garner support in the GCC and could even be revisited as part of the current talks between Riyadh and Tehran.

As envisioned in my study published by the Belfer Center, a genuine and serious effort to construct a ME WMDFZ could benefit from a United Nations Security Council resolution whereby the permanent members of the Security Council bolster incentives for states in the region through guaranteeing a nuclear security umbrella for joining states; rewarding the states that join the ME WMDFZ with economic and technical support; and sanctioning those that refuse to join.¹

Such a declaration of intent could be sufficient to incentivize Israel to stop its dawdling, join the NPT and accept the hand of peace extended to it since 2002 by the Arab Peace Initiative.² Iran will be equally incentivized to come clean on its secretive and suspicious programme. Failing to create a WMD-free zone in the Middle East will certainly incentivize some countries in the region to undertake what may prove to be a fateful decision that will enhance instability rather than confirm security and peace for our region.

1 Turki Al Faisal, "A Political Plan for a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East", Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 9 July 2013, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/political-plan-weapons-mass-destruction-free-zone-wmdfz-middle-east>

2 Terje Rød-Larsen, Nur Laiq and Fabrice Aidan, *The Search for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Compendium of Documents and Analysis*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 484.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL FOR WMD DISARMAMENT AND COOPERATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST¹

NAJLA ALQASSIMI





INTRODUCTION

The Middle East region has a conflict-ridden and rapidly changing security environment. In several instances, diplomatic solutions have failed to prevent wars between and within the states of the region, and in these wars the use of certain weapons has gone beyond the battlefield to cause humanitarian disasters. Such events should give us pause and push us to provide alternatives and solutions that promote peaceful dialogue and employ technology in the service of humanity.

The Middle East is an important region for the whole world: it is the link between east and west and is an important maritime route for both security and commercial purposes. The region also holds the largest energy reserves, on which all countries in the world rely in one way or another. For these reasons, the peace and security of the Middle East is of international interest, and regional conflicts have often gone beyond its borders to include international interventions.

Notwithstanding the important role of internationally sponsored resolutions to address regional conflicts, the sustainability of peace and security in the Middle East is only possible through the commitment of the region's states. They must find the solutions that ensure their security while creating opportunities for the development, growth, and success of their peoples. That being said, we should not discount the importance of international engagement to manage crises and help Middle Eastern states adhere to their commitments and fulfil their obligations.

1 The original essay was submitted in Arabic. This is a provisional translation by Tomisha Bino. The translator bears sole responsibility for any inaccuracies.

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CREATING A REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR WMD DISARMAMENT

In recent years, the international community has retreated from engaging in resolving regional conflicts, which has prolonged these conflicts and left them with no solution in sight. The case of the Syrian Arab Republic is just one example: this has created unprecedented rifts among states in the Middle East, fuelled by a history of conflict, at a time when it is crucial to find regional mechanisms to resolve the issues that threaten the

security of the region and prevent it from achieving the stability and prosperity it strives for.

Renouncing all types of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) could be the cornerstone for developing a regional collective security framework. Instead, we are witnessing a shift from direct international involvement in the region to regional polarization through proxy conflicts. In these, extra-regional powers shore up their traditional spheres of influence without having to provide real solutions to the region's problems.

In this period of heightened tensions, it is crucial for states in the Middle East to seek internationally sponsored regional dialogue on solutions that are tailored to the region's needs and serve its purposes. An informative precedent is the Latin American experience with the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco. This emerged from direct negotiations and agreement among the countries concerned and includes mechanisms that address the particular challenges of the region and prevent regional tensions from leading to wars. The regional nature of such a mechanism should not, however, preclude an international role, especially in ensuring compliance and taking advantage of the experience of international organizations to promote transparency and information sharing and to create the right environment for cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear, chemical, and biological technology and research.

It is important to stress that there is a collective responsibility to ensure the prohibition of nuclear weapons and other WMD. This requires the support of the international community to ensure continuing regional compliance, through guaranteeing security and providing the monitoring mechanisms needed. Simultaneously, the international community must offer security, economic, and technological incentives to strengthen the agreement and build on the work of the first session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, held in 2019.

BUILDING A NEW PUBLIC POLICY

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) considers the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMD in the Middle East (ME WMDFZ) a foreign

policy priority, as was mentioned in a 2019 speech by the UAE's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Hamad Alkaabi.² During the past decade, the UAE has been building an alternative model that rejects military applications of nuclear technology and takes advantage of its peaceful applications to serve development projects, which do not pose an international proliferation threat.

Military applications of nuclear technology have long been an obstacle to its peaceful uses, as their development was always seen as a potential proliferation risk. In some cases, merely acquiring nuclear know-how and technology was seen as a first step towards nuclear proliferation and increased security and environmental risks.

States have a right to pursue peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Its particular benefits include providing an additional source of energy production; supporting water security through desalination in a region where water scarcity is a key challenge; and offering important medical uses such in cancer treatment.

States in the Middle East have worked with the IAEA to develop their peaceful nuclear programmes. Although these programmes have remained limited in their capability for political, economic, or security-related reasons, the need to develop these capabilities further has become more vital in the past decade. This necessitates states building up their technological and institutional infrastructure to support the upcoming advances in this field.³

The UAE case presents an alternative model for a programme that chooses nuclear cooperation with the international community. Despite its nuclear programme being still in its early stages, the UAE is focusing its efforts on developing its systems and keeping pace with other states that are active in this field. It does this while complying with its voluntary commitments, adhering to the international mechanisms and all agreements related to nuclear power, and developing its national regulatory and monitoring instruments.

Through this model, the UAE has had unprecedented levels of cooperation with international organizations and through bilateral cooperation agreements. This has created a high degree of transparency that has enabled the UAE to benefit from international expertise in developing its nuclear programme.

The challenge for the UAE model is that its national capacities are still being developed and that it still relies heavily on international expertise. It can be argued that this international cooperation has created a higher degree of transparency. However, it is also not sustainable in the long run. The UAE is thus working to develop its national capacities through cooperation with its international partners and by providing sufficient funds to support scholarships for its nationals in this field. In this way it will ensure the safety, security, and operability of its nuclear facilities in the future. The UAE has been working closely with the international community in the fields of information exchange and scientific research to help develop its nuclear capabilities.

2 Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, "UAE Reaffirms Commitments to Achieving & Maintaining World Free from Threat of Nuclear Weapons, Weapons of Mass Destruction", New York, 22 November 2019.

3 L. Windsor et al., "Technical and Political Assessment of Peaceful Nuclear Power Program Prospects in North Africa and the Middle East", Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, Sep. 2007.

In a regional forum for nuclear cooperation, Middle Eastern states could together examine the needs of the region and provide solutions that address them. This could help promote a common understanding among these states.

TRUST- AND CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES

The Middle East has long suffered deep divisions among its states in the competition for regional leadership. Fuelled by political, religious, and ideological conflicts, this competition has led to regional and civil wars, where in some cases WMD, specifically chemical weapons, were used. Their devastating effects have not only resulted in the loss of trust among states in the region, but also among the different peoples in the region more broadly.

This ongoing crisis of trust in the region has resulted in a regional arms race. Israel's insistence on preserving its regional military and technological superiority, including its ambiguous nuclear programme, led the Islamic Republic of Iran to develop its own nuclear programme and perhaps even nuclear weapons to keep up. This arms race makes other states in the region wonder whether they should also be building up their military capabilities to keep up with this regional show of force. It is true that every state has the right to defend itself and its interests. However, it is unacceptable, in legal and humanitarian terms, when this right results in the development of WMD. These weapons have been repeatedly used in the region – in the Iran–Iraq War in the 1980s, with the massacre in Halabja, and more recently in Syria – resulting in humanitarian disasters and making it clear that these weapons have not been developed to serve as a deterrent, but to persecute and oppress.

States in the region are still unwilling and unable to be transparent enough about their nuclear, chemical, or biological programmes. This reluctance could be political or security-related, or due to the absence of agreements with the relevant international organizations that could monitor these programmes, such as safeguards agreements with the IAEA. For these reasons, the UAE has adopted five basic principles which include (a) complete operational transparency; (b) adoption of the highest standards of nuclear non-proliferation, safety and security; (c) direct coordination with the IAEA and its protocols; (d) building strong partnerships with states and organizations that have experience in the nuclear field; and (e) ensuring the long-term sustainability of nuclear energy.⁴

Establishing a regional framework, such as the ME WMDFZ, can foster a better understanding of the different views and positions of states, demonstrate good faith, and build trust among the different parties by creating a space for regional dialogue and cooperation. Such a space would help find solutions for an issue that touches on aspects ranging from military and security cooperation through to human rights and environmental

⁴ Ahmed Gamal, [The UAE's Peaceful Nuclear Programme: Figures and Facts], WAM, Abu Dhabi, 17 Nov. 2020, <https://wam.ae/ar/details/1395302824550> (in Arabic).

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considerations. It is also fertile ground to start developing regional agreements that would de-escalate several conflicts and create diplomatic alternatives to address their causes. In the light of the tensions among some states of the region, the pursuit of equal security and ensuring each state's ability to defend its territory is a legitimate principle and right. It has, however, resulted in some states seeking nuclear weapons as a necessary means of self-defence, as has been the case with Israel and Iran. This trend has opened a Pandora's box of similar pursuits by others in the region, which has further deepened tensions and will undermine economic development goals if allowed to continue.

ECONOMIC INCENTIVES

There is no question that developing WMD strains the budget of states in a region such as the Middle East, where large-scale development projects are needed to ensure a better standard of living for its people. Forswearing WMD programmes will create a peace dividend that could be redirected into job creation in sectors that serve the respective communities and contribute to state-building.

The coming years will see further developments in the commercial uses of peaceful nuclear technology. To be able to take advantage of these advances, the states of the Middle East will need to develop a regional economic mechanism that can support trade in these technologies while having a proper monitoring system in place to ensure their safety and security and to avoid diversion. Global developments in the peaceful applications of nuclear power, as well as peaceful uses of chemical and biological materials, cannot be ignored by the region and should be taken advantage of. For example, despite falling oil prices and the competitiveness of renewable energy sources, the range of peaceful uses of nuclear power go beyond power generation and provide solutions for one of the region's most pressing concerns: overcoming water scarcity through nuclear water desalination. This was outlined in a public policy

paper published by the UAE Government explaining its nuclear energy policy and rationale.⁵ Nuclear energy is environmentally sustainable and, competes economically with alternative energy sources. This has led the UAE to develop its nuclear energy sector through international cooperation, in order to safeguard its economic security by ensuring the stability of its energy sources.⁶

One useful step forward could be to develop economic models of mutual dependence with different states in providing nuclear materials and expertise, which would also help to create new economic opportunities. This knock-on effect has been demonstrated through the increased volume of general trade and the formation of closer political and cultural ties that followed the agreement between the UAE and the Republic of Korea to develop the former's peaceful nuclear capabilities – in particular, to construct the UAE's nuclear reactor.⁷

The UAE has long adopted policies that promote free trade. The passage of all types of goods from all part of the globe poses a challenge in the monitoring of exports, especially when it concerns dual-use chemical and biological materials. Despite these challenges, the UAE has taken steps to diversify its non-fossil fuel-related economic sectors. One such step was the establishment of the Dubai Science Park in 2005, which hosts scientific laboratories for biological research, while Abu Dhabi has established a chemical industries city. In step with these developments, the UAE must work with the international community in developing its oversight bodies and production facilities in the country.

The open nature of the UAE creates opportunities for investment and employment internationally and makes it an excellent location to safely implement projects in the nuclear, chemical, or biological fields. To achieve this, it has the necessary technological infrastructure and institutional support for investment in the future generations.

SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION AND THE EXCHANGE OF EXPERTISE

The UAE has signed a so-called 123 Agreement with the United States of America as a legal basis to guarantee future cooperation between the two countries in the field of peaceful nuclear energy, whether through trade or exchange of expertise. This agreement paves the way for the UAE to develop its scientific capabilities in this field in order to serve its strategic objective of diversifying its investment and industrial landscape and supporting its national developmental projects, while ensuring the transparency of its nuclear programme. The issue of nuclear enrichment has been a barrier to the development of nuclear programmes in many countries, which has led the UAE to abandon domestic enrichment capabilities in order to ensure progress in its relations with the international community and to achieve its interests.

The UAE has also established an independent regulatory body, which has signed a number of agreements with research centres around the world to establish an information network that serves the country's future objectives. It has also supported several initiatives that encourage cooperation among Arab

⁵ UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, "Policy of the United Arab Emirates on Evaluation and Potential Development of Peaceful Nuclear Energy", Abu Dhabi, [n.d., retrieved on 3 November 2021], https://www.uae-embassy.org/sites/default/files/UAE_Policy_Peaceful_Nuclear_Energy_English.pdf

⁶ Nuclear Threat Initiative, "United Arab Emirates", October 2018, <https://www.nti.org/countries/united-arab-emirates/>

⁷ Homeland Shield Patrol, [Reading the results of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan's visit to South Korea], Dawriat Dire Alwatani [Nation Shield], 1 April 2019 (in Arabic).

researchers in fields such as outer space. Such initiatives could be expanded to nuclear, chemical, and biological research initiatives, with free-trade zones in the UAE acting as an incubator for their development.

THE INSTITUTIONAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The international community has elaborated legal frameworks to limit the spread of WMD, addressing the three main categories: nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. The countries of the Middle East, with some exceptions, have signed most of these instruments. This has become a main bone of contention between the states of the region. The most significant is Israel, which has not yet joined the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, maintains the ambiguity of its nuclear programme, and does not subject all its facilities to IAEA comprehensive safeguards. This has in turn been used as a justification by such states as Iran to develop their own nuclear and missile capabilities.

In contrast, the UAE has signed the international agreements regulating its nuclear, chemical, and biological sectors, in addition to bilateral agreements that increase the level of transparency and cooperation with international actors in these fields. It is committed to opening all of its facilities to international inspectors and encourages cooperation with researchers and investors to work in the country through a system developed to serve this sector. The regulatory institutions created include:

1. The Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation, which aims to develop the nuclear programme of the UAE and issue licences
2. The Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation, which supervises nuclear safety and security and radiation protection
3. Local environmental bodies
4. The Committee for Commodities Subject to Import & Export Control.

CONCLUSION

The challenges facing the Middle East are many and often develop into crises. They must be addressed with a great deal of transparency and an open space for dialogue and diplomatic solutions. The first to be addressed should be thorny issues such as disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, which have already caused this region humanitarian catastrophes that must not be repeated. Developmental goals should be a policy priority of states in the region, and these require a secure regional environment. Security objectives that are not driven by the need to create security for the people of the region are of no use and do not serve the common good.

Establishing a ME WMDfz would create a cooperative environment for regional cooperation in different fields of scientific research for peaceful purposes and technologically advanced manufacturing. It could thus be the starting point for addressing the contentious issues in the region.

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PERSPECTIVES, DRIVERS, AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE ME WMDFZ:

VOICES FROM THE REGION

The changing political and security context in the Middle East and internationally requires a fresh look on existing positions of states in the region on the Middle East weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone (ME WMDFZ). In this publication, experts from eight Middle Eastern states discuss the positions and potential incentives, as well as dis- and missing incentives for their country's engagement with the ME WMDFZ. By identifying and collate the incentives of different states in the region, this publication aims to promote better understanding of regional states' security dilemmas and specific concerns related to the WMDFZ, identify points of convergence that can be built upon and points of divergence that need to be bridged, as well as facilitate exchange and dialogue among regional experts and expand regional capacity.