

## **The 56th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs**

### ***A Region in Transition: Peace and Reform in the Middle East***

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### **Report on WG2: Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in the Middle East and the Establishment of a WMD-Free Zone**

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The goal of a weapons of mass destruction (WMD) free zone in the Middle East has been repeatedly affirmed by all states involved as well as the international community at the highest political levels and has been included in many important documents. In the working group, we had participants from China, Czech Republic, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, The Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, UK and USA; all participated as individuals and not as representatives of their countries. First, the present situation of WMDs in this region was reviewed and the history of attempts to promote a WMD-free zone was assessed. Subsequently, the relationship between WMD-free zones and comprehensive security frameworks was evaluated. Finally, some concrete proposals for steps forward were put on the table.

#### **Present situation of WMDs in the Middle East and risks for further proliferation**

The non-proliferation regime is in great danger of eroding, particularly in the Middle East. This constitutes a considerable concern and the working group acknowledged that the different issues related to WMDs in the Middle East cannot be discussed in isolation of the region's political environment, security requirements, and threat perceptions. Given the entrenched positions of the different parties, the approach that should now be taken is a step-by-step approach with elimination of WMDs from the Middle East as its ultimate goal.

Several countries in the Middle East (here defined as the Arab countries plus Israel and Iran) are known or suspected to possess or be developing nuclear, chemical and/or biological weapons. The lack of signature or ratification of particular arms-control agreements may serve as a first indicator for the possible presence of programmes related to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs). In the working group, assessments were presented of the stages the various WMD-related programmes have reached. These presentations included programmes on the delivery of such weapons by means of missiles. Before the group entered into a discussion of the concrete steps that could be taken, particular attention was paid to the Israeli and Iranian nuclear files.

Israel is not a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nor the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), and has signed but not ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Based on an assessment by the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Israel is estimated to have about 100-200 nuclear weapons (NWs). These weapons were developed in response to existential threats. Even though existential threats do not seem realistic at the moment, the Israeli leadership still wants to hold on to the weapon. Israel has not used its NWs as an instrument of coercion in its international relations, but this may change if Iran or other countries develop nuclear weapons too.

Iran is a state party to all three WMD treaties mentioned and is considered not to possess NWs. Still, the Iranian nuclear programme is a cause of concern to the international community. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has not yet been able to fully clarify Iran's nuclear history. Since Iran's nuclear programme was discussed at the Pugwash Workshop on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament held in Amsterdam, June 7-8, 2006, there have been some further developments. Members of the Security Council are currently discussing a sanction resolution, since Iran is still continuing its enrichment activities. It deserves mentioning here that the Iranian nuclear programme currently being monitored by the IAEA is still in its early stages; if the number of cascades is not increased significantly, it will take several years before Iran would be capable of producing weapons-grade material in useful quantities. Furthermore, we must remember that Article IV of the NPT as well as its negotiating history clearly indicate that uranium enrichment is not banned from any nuclear programme as long as it is for peaceful purposes only and occurs within the framework of the NPT. Iran has not accepted enrichment suspension as a precondition for entering into negotiations with the international community. Some participants argued, however, that Iran somehow needs to regain the trust of the international community and that one way of doing this was to temporarily suspend its enrichment activities. The general opinion of the working group was that the United States and other countries should engage Iran diplomatically and politically to address international concerns that Iran has not fully clarified for the IAEA aspects of its nuclear history.

### **History of the attempts to promote WMD/NW-free zones in the Middle East**

The positions regarding a WMD/NW-free zone in the Middle East seem to be deadlocked at the moment; they are as well known as they are entrenched, as was also reflected in some of the discussions of the working group. The original proposal for a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East was made by Iran, backed by Egypt, in 1974. In 1990, Egypt proposed to expand the proposal to establish a zone free of WMDs. In dealing with NWs, chemical weapons (CWs) and biological weapons (BW), we should retain the distinctions between these weapons. There is a significant difference in scale of mass destruction between NWs on the one hand and BWs and CWs on the other hand. Furthermore, these weapons have different international legal regimes associated with them. In this sense the establishment of a WMD-free zone can also be regarded as the end result of having all parties sign, ratify and adhere to the existing arms-control agreements.

The goal of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East has been affirmed by the Security Council, member states of the NPT and Israel. It has been a topic of discussion at countless conferences and seminars. The rhetoric, however, is far from the reality. Elsewhere in the world, NWFZs

have been successfully negotiated and adopted, but the difference with such a zone for the Middle East is that the states in existing NWFZs did not possess or seek NWs and mainly wanted to keep other countries' NWs away from their own territories.

The current deadlock on negotiations towards a WMD-free zone in the Middle East is a direct result of substantively different starting positions. The position of the Arab states is that Israel's nuclear capabilities are destabilising and their inclusion from the beginning in the negotiations is a precondition to peace and security in the region. Israel's position is that the establishment of peaceful relations, reconciliation, mutual recognition and good neighbourliness, and complementary conventional and non-conventional arms control measures constitute preconditions for establishing a NWFZ and achieving the vision of a WMD-free zone. These apparently polar opposite positions are what led to the breakdown in 1995 of the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) talks within the Middle East Peace Process.

In general, it seems that the concept of a WMD-free zone was largely used by some of the parties involved for other political and diplomatic purposes. The question that lies before is whether all countries are really willing to deal with the problem in a serious fashion.

### **The relationship between WMD-free zones and comprehensive security frameworks**

There are obvious connections between the achievement of comprehensive peace and security, on the one hand, and disarmament towards a WMD-free zone, on the other hand. This implies that the two objectives of a framework for peace and security and a WMD-free zone should be treated simultaneously. We should move from the entrenched positions that pose preconditions and 'think outside the box'. There was wide (though not unanimous) agreement among the working group participants that what is needed is a renewed effort in regional security dialogue. There was less agreement on whether such a dialogue should start with 'soft security' issues in the beginning and progress towards WMDs later, or the 'hard security' issue of WMDs should also be discussed from the start, but it was clear that only a step-by-step approach would be feasible. It was proposed that one of the first steps to be taken is to constrain the rhetoric by political leaders, for example the rhetoric by Israeli politicians on settlement policies and by Iranian leaders on the legitimacy and right to existence of Israel. In cases where there seems to be wide public support for such statements within countries, leaders bear a special responsibility to engage in dialogue with leaders from adversarial states. For any progress to be made towards a WMD-free zone the perceptions of security by different parties in the Middle East will need to change. Recent developments with respect to nuclear programmes in the Middle East mean that indeed the security calculations made by the countries in the region may change.

### **Some steps forward towards a WMD-free zone in the Middle East**

Instead of being little more than a rhetorical device, a WMD-free zone in the Middle East is an idea whose time has now come. For the first time a plausible argument can be made that it is in the direct security interest of *all* countries in the region, including Israel, to pursue this objective rather than trying to deal with the complexities, instability, risks and expense of multifaceted proliferation in the Middle East. Once this new calculation comes to be more widely accepted, then one of the key strategic conditions will be met, making it more possible to start real talks

than at any time since Iran and Egypt first proposed a NWFZ in the Middle East in 1974. Even so, negotiations will be tough and politically demanding, and no-one should be surprised if they take a long time and include set backs before there is any chance of success. In any case, preconditions need to be set aside.

The general feeling in the working group was that to reach agreement on new steps towards a WMD-free zone, new initiatives at different levels of diplomacy are direly needed. A Track II initiative was proposed under the name 'Council for Security Cooperation in the Middle East' (CSCoME, which would be pronounced 'sis-com'), modelled after the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP, which is pronounced 'sis-cap'). This initiative envisions a non-governmental process for multilateral security dialogue in the Middle East. The working group focused much of its discussion on the desirability of a Track I.5 initiative, sanctioned by governments and involving both governmental representatives and experts from non-governmental organisations. Potential sponsors of Track II and Track I.5 initiatives could be Japan; one or more of the Scandinavian countries; the New Agenda Coalition; or the Seven Nation Initiative. Also negotiations should begin – perhaps first starting with the relatively uncontentious issues – at the intergovernmental level (Track I). It is of utmost important to have a platform with seminars and workshops at some level of institutionalisation where the crucial issues related to WMDs can be discussed among the different parties involved.

So what are the steps that could be taken that make the region move closer to the establishment of a WMD-free zone? Above all, the conditions need to be developed for such a zone and existing legal arrangements need to be strengthened. This can be done in three parallel ways, varying from relatively easy to relatively difficult:

1. *Enhanced co-operation and Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs)*: Enhanced co-operation between all parties in the region can be considered in the area of public health, including epidemiological surveillance, diagnostic measures, training and planning on preparedness, or in the areas of firefighting, earth quakes, landshifts and water. It was proposed that within the mentioned frameworks for discussions also more difficult issues can be discussed. For instance, the participation in existing CSBMs of WMD treaties can be promoted and new CSBMs can be proposed that create more transparency on WMDs and deal with notification of materials, missiles and agents. Also the parties could participate in joint seminars on their military doctrines and the role that WMDs play in these. There could be mutual inspections of military exercises and visits to military headquarters. As other areas of co-operation that may require separate agreements it was proposed that Egypt and Israel develop a mutual environmental protection system to monitor leakages from nuclear facilities, and – even going further – that Egypt and Israel start a programme of mutual and reciprocal visits to nuclear sites within both countries.
2. *Application and implementation of available agreements on non-proliferation and arms control*: All the parties involved in the African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone should be encouraged to ratify the Treaty of Pelindaba. A proposal was made in the working group that Israel should declare that it will behave 'as if' it were a member of the NPT (this was France's policy up to 1992, when it acceded to the Treaty) and should join the Nuclear Weapons States moratorium on the production of weapons-grade fissile material.

National and international export controls on WMD and WMD-related items should be strengthened. It was proposed that all countries should be urged to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to their safeguards agreements with the IAEA.

3. *Negotiation of new agreements:* There is a continuing need for scientific and technical studies into the possibilities to further strengthen the IAEA safeguards system. Two examples of existing regional institutions – EURATOM and ABACC – were discussed and a Middle East Council for Controlling Atomic Energy (MECCAE) was proposed. Given the likely expansion of nuclear energy in the Middle East and the concerns that materials may be diverted into military programmes, regional agreements on the nuclear fuel cycle are desirable. With respect to energy policies and agreements in the Middle East more in general, it was suggested that it would be more profitable and desirable for countries in the Middle East to invest in renewable energy instead of nuclear energy. With respect to the adoption of new agreements at the global level, all countries have a responsibility to sign and ratify the CTBT and to proceed with and conclude negotiations on a Fissile Materials Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) that bans the further production of weapons-grade fissile material and should include Israel and Iran (both countries agreed in 1998 on the mandate for the FMCT). Finally, ballistic missiles were identified to constitute an issue that should be dealt with by a regional treaty.

To conclude, all states within and without the Middle East should be urged to work towards the establishment of a zone free of Weapons of Mass Destruction and to enter into discussions regarding the modalities of such a zone within a comprehensive peace and security framework. Some specific steps can already be taken, as was outlined in this report.