



## Pugwash Consultation

### “Toward a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East: Nuclear proliferation and proliferation risks”

Beirut, Lebanon, 10 September 2012

#### REPORT

This meeting was organized by Pugwash in cooperation with the Lebanese Atomic Energy Commission-National Council for Scientific Research (LAEC-CNRS) and the MENA Strategic Studies Center.

Participants discussed a variety of issues regarding the presence of WMDs in the region, the risks of WMD proliferation as well as the opportunities for disarmament and nonproliferation, with special focus on the Conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction (WMDFZ) to be held in Helsinki in December 2012.

This workshop involved 18 participants (please see appendix for the participant list). The meeting was held according to traditional Pugwash/Chatham House rules: participants took part in their individual capacities; statements are not attributed to any individual; and distribution of the substance of discussions is encouraged. There was no attempt to achieve consensus, but rather, as in all Pugwash meetings, the goal was to encourage the sharing of diverse perspectives. The report reflects the fact that no Israeli participated in the workshop.<sup>1</sup>

The topics addressed in formal presentations and open-discussions can be grouped into the following sections.

- Prospects for the Helsinki WMDFZ Conference
- The spread of nuclear energy in the Middle East
- Iranian nuclear program
- Nuclear armed Israel

#### Prospects for the Helsinki WMDFZ Conference

The large majority of participants expressed mixed feelings about the effectiveness and the possible outcome of the forthcoming Conference. Although it is hoped that the Conference might deliver some positive outcomes, expectations are not particularly high and a *realistic* assessment

<sup>1</sup> This report was prepared by Paolo Foradori, Italian Pugwash, Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento (Italy). The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the rapporteur, the Pugwash Conferences or any of the sponsoring organizations. Pugwash appreciates the support for its Middle East project provided by the Norwegian MFA, the Carnegie Corporation, other funders and our national groups

of the formidable challenges in need of resolution prevails. For virtually all participants it is obvious that the Conference cannot be a single event but, in the best possible scenario, just the beginning of a long-term process.

Despite the many obstacles, many believe that the establishment of a WMDFZ is the only possible way to address and find a solution to the presence of WMDs in the Middle East and to the risk of their further proliferation. Chances of progress toward disarmament in the region exist only through a comprehensive and multilateral negotiation process.

Several participants, however, expressed doubts in the real interest of Israel in a successful conference, while underscoring the commitment and good faith in the WMDFZ proposal on the part of all Arab countries.

Some highlighted the low profile and passivity kept by Lebanon and called for a more active and visible role of the country (which will be next chair of the Arab League) in the discussions in the run-up to the Conference and in future negotiations. For some participants, Lebanon could play a relevant role in supporting the goal of a WMDFZ also in the technical field providing expertise and training for human resources through the European Union-sponsored Centers of Excellence.

The impact of the so-called Arab Spring was addressed. Diverging opinions were presented and discussed. On the one hand, some participants argued that the ongoing process of democratization in the Middle East might promote increasing support to the long-term objective of a WMDFZ; others are convinced that anti-Israeli and anti-Western sentiments in the public of many Arab countries might press the new leaders to take a stronger stance vis a vis Israel, highlighting the too-long-tolerated 'double standards' and power asymmetries. As a consequence, room for accommodation and compromise at the negotiating table might dramatically shrinks.

Consensus, however, exists among the participants that the Helsinki Conference is a rare opportunity that cannot be missed and needs full support.

### **The spread of nuclear energy in the Middle East**

A thorough examination of the nuclear energy programs in the region was presented in the workshop. Despite the nuclear incident of Fukushima, the Middle East's interest in nuclear energy remains very high and prospects for rapid development in the next decades are real. Key drivers include increasing demand by regional countries of energy and especially of electricity; increase in the domestic oil consumption and need to diversify energy production for maintaining current standard in oil exports; desalination of sea-water; growing concern for global climate change.

Several participants expressed support to various schemes of nuclear energy cooperation at the regional level, which are deemed key to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy in the Middle East and optimize expenses. Some participants highlighted also the nonproliferation value of regional nuclear facilities and arrangements as a way of reducing the most sensible proliferation aspects of the nuclear energy technology, which – as one participant stressed – remains intrinsically "dual use". Ideas and opinions on regional and multinational arrangements were presented and discussed, including the proposal of a regional fuel bank and of a regional

verification agency for the Middle East (MEATOM), inspired by the experience of EURATOM in the European context.

Although most participants highly value a regional approach to nuclear energy, many were also keen to stress that any proposal for multinational nuclear energy cooperation cannot infringe on the inalienable right of each country of the region to develop its own national nuclear program independently and in accordance to its own perceived national interests. In this regard, the Iranian case was thoroughly discussed (see also section on Iran below).

One participant noted that the '1-2-3 agreements' to voluntarily accept limits to fuel cycle and reprocessing activities (as in the case of the United Arab Emirates) are strongly opposed by most Arab countries.

### **Iranian nuclear program**

The issue of Iran was thoroughly addressed. One participant gave a presentation of the history of the program, highlighting that the resolve of Iran to embark on an indigenously based program was essentially a consequence of the lack of cooperation and assistance by external powers to support the Iranian nuclear ambitions.

Many participants reiterated the inalienable right of Tehran to nuclear energy for peaceful uses, including uranium enrichment. In providing a detailed presentation on the state of Iran's uranium enrichment program, a participant argued that there is no evidence that Iran is anyhow close to an uranium weapon-grade capability.

Many doubt that Iran wants a nuclear bomb, although it has been noted that a nuclear capability is by itself a deterrent. Several participants are convinced that Iran is abiding by the rules (although it has failed to properly report some nuclear activities) and is the most heavily inspected country by IAEA.

The negotiations for a diplomatic solution are locked in a stalemate. The risk of failure in the negotiations between the P5+1 countries and Iran is real. Widespread concern was expressed by the participants that the situation might escalate out of control if there is no progress on the diplomatic front.

The Western, and especially the US, attitude in the negotiations was criticized by several participants. Serious doubts were expressed as to the US real intentions. One participant recalled the numerous instances in which Tehran showed its willingness at finding a solution, as during the Khatami era or in the case of the Brazil/Turkey brokered uranium swap deal, which was first promoted by the US and then boycotted by Washington once Tehran agreed on the offer. If the West is not ready to make any substantial concession, negotiations are bound to lead nowhere. The fundamental problem is that the US is not searching for a genuine deal but instead aims at changing the Iranian regime: the nuclear threat is good leverage to press for regime change.

### **Nuclear-armed Israel**

According to several participants, a nuclear-armed Israel is the main, if not the sole, obstacle to the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East. Even the interest that some other regional

states might have in WMDs is fundamentally a consequence of the existing Israeli nuclear arsenal that has somehow to be balanced. It is believed that if Israel agreed to dismantle its nuclear arsenal and signed the NPT, the WMDFZ would be soon established.

The workshop's participants engaged in a long discussion on whether balancing (conventional as well as non-conventional arms race) or engaging in disarmament/nonproliferation talks (namely by supporting the WMDFZ proposal) is the best strategy to address this power asymmetry. For a few participants, Arab countries and Iran cannot avoid efforts at balancing in order to pressure Israel on negotiating its nuclear disarmament. In very clear language, a participant underscored the unacceptable dual-standards that the West applies towards Iran and even argued about the right that Hezbollah and Iran have to possess nuclear weapons.

Many other participants express deep concern about such a balancing strategy and expressed their concerns that this might lead to further instability and draw the region into a very dangerous path. They categorically rejected the idea that more nuclear weapons in the region could have a stabilizing effect.

For some participants, however, it is true that the Israeli nuclear arsenal is a key problem, but other elements are to be factored in, such as the deep mistrust, lack of cooperation, adversarial relations and hegemony struggles among other regional key countries.

Some participants fear that Israel does not have a genuine interest in a successful WMDFZ Conference and think it will try its best to turn the event into a failure. However, it was also noted that Israeli exceptionalism is not only no longer acceptable but probably not sustainable. Hence, it would be in the Israeli own long term interest to have serious discussions in creating the conditions for a WMDFZ in the Middle East.

## Participant list

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Mr. walid Charara	Consultancy Center for studies and archiving
Mr. Hussein Izzi	Consultancy Center for studies and archiving
Mr. Paolo Foradori	Pugwash - Italy
Mr. Steve Miller	Pugwash - USA
Mr. Paolo Cotta-Ramusino	Pugwash - Italy
Mr. Maurizio Martellini	IWG – LNCV - Italy
Mr. Mahmoud Nassreddine	Menassc
Mr. Mouïn Hamzé	Secretary General - CNRS
Mr. Bilal Nsouli	Director - LAEC
B. General Tony Chehwan	Lebanese Army
B. General Kassem Jammoul	Lebanese Army
Mr. Mohammad Roumieh	Head Dept. Nuclear Security - LAEC
Mr. Raed El Khadem	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr. Hassan Bsat	LAEC
Mr. Ahmad Reslan	LAEC