

Amb. Dr. Mohamed Shaker,
Chairman of the Board, Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (ECFA)
Working group «Iran in Regional and Global Perspective» at the Strategic Studies Summit,
Bangkok, Thailand
Feb. 23-25, 2014



Policy memo

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A few years ago, I was greatly impressed by the 2005 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) expert group's report on multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle. Two years later, in 2007, I was equally impressed by the decision of the Arab League Summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to undertake joint cooperative activities for the development of peaceful uses of nuclear energy & related technology in the Arab World. The Arab Atomic Energy Agency, located in Tunisia, was directed to consider ways and means for Arab cooperation in this area in an integrated Arab framework (emphasis added). The restructuring of the Agency, however, is expected to take a long time. It has not even started yet.

Both events, the IAEA report and the Arab Summit inspired me to write an article on "Nuclear Power in the Arab World and the Regionalization of the Nuclear Fuel Cycle", published in Daedulus, Winter 2010. It reflects my views on the issue as far as the Arab World is concerned but with an open mind to learn more about the way to proceed, and whether Iran could be part of it as a way out of its confrontation with the IAEA and the United Nations (UN) Security Council, a so-called diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear problem.

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Likewise, the Agreement signed in Geneva on 23rd November 2013 between Iran and the 5+1 group, and the further negotiations required, revived as well my interest in the regionalization of the nuclear fuel cycle.

The Agreement and its implementation should be considered as a first step towards a longer accommodation that may or may not involve Iran's Arab neighbors who so far were kept away from the negotiations as if they did not matter, although they would have been the first to suffer dire consequences if the negotiations had failed.

Regionalization of the nuclear fuel cycle in its ideal or optimal form may indicate to some extent self-reliance and probably a division of labor or expertise, among its participants. It is quite possible, and even desirable, that no one participant in the cycle would have all the essential elements of the cycle. Its operation would greatly depend on the cooperation and coordination between its members and not in isolation from other states or similar groups.

With regard to enrichment, a consensus almost exists: All sensitive nuclear technologies should preferably be internationalized or regionalized.

The advantages of regionalization:

- Regionalization would be a gradual build-up. It will proceed in phases.
- Every individual state would have a say in one way or another.
- Economies of scale in the operation and the running of such an enterprise.
- The existence of effective regional control as well as international control by the IAEA.

Regional effective control would be the basis and the prelude to international control by the IAEA. With both levels of control, we would minimize risks and guarantee international responsibility. We should learn from the Euratom experience, and maybe ABBAC, as unique arrangements, involving Argentina, Brazil, and the IAEA, and

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under the umbrella of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL).

- Strengthening non-proliferation norms, each party to the cycle will be checking on the others.
- Bridging the gap between the developed and the less developed countries in the nuclear technology.
- Regionalization in the Middle East may facilitate the establishment of a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East. One must admit that the WMD-Free Zone itself may lead to a regional nuclear fuel cycle.

In all modesty and as a follow up on the Arab nuclear fuel cycle, I believe that the internationalization or the regionalization of the sensitive technologies in Iran is the way out of the present crisis. It may not only be the ideal diplomatic solution we are all seeking, but also a technical, economic, and political solution as well, a so-called multifaceted solution.

What does this solution mean? It means that Arab neighbors of Iran, whether individually or as members of an Arab nuclear fuel cycle in the making would be sharing Iran in the ownership and the management of its sensitive technologies without necessarily having access to the technologies themselves, which will remain the private domain of Iran. Moreover, each party to such an agreement would be checking on the others, thereby strengthening non-proliferation norms.

Arabs and Iranians will certainly have to agree on such an arrangement, and the world at large as well. This would be an ideal way to bring the two civilizations closer to each other, Arabs and Persians, Shiaa and Sunni Muslims, which would open avenues of cooperation as well as overcoming and settling problems that have kept them far apart on many crucial issues in the region.

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This reconciliation would engender stability and security in one of the most strategic areas of the world.

It might be said by hardline supporters of sanctions on Iran that what we are suggesting is virtually rewarding a violator that should not escape punishment. What is hoped to be accomplished is to bring Iran to the fold as a positive and peaceful contributing member to its milieu and immediate sphere, which would engender a new era in the region and the world at large.

A possible significant result of such an accommodation is Iran's opening to the world and more important, the rebirth of a new Iran.

What about Israel in such a new step?, one may ask. Israel will have to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and accept full scope IAEA safeguards as it is the only country in the Middle East that has not yet adhered to the NPT. Israel should also demonstrate good will in joining other countries of the region in Helsinki, to negotiate together a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East (ME). Israel will also have to honor its commitment to the "Two-State" solution in Palestine. If Israel were to do so, it will be accepted in the region. This would engender a new era in the whole region, stable and secure.

It would not be easy to convince the Iranians and their Arab neighbors to promote the regionalization of the nuclear fuel cycle in the Middle East region. If the idea were to trigger the interest of all potential parties, it would take a long time to negotiate the suggested scheme of the fuel cycle. The negotiations would definitely entail the involvement and commitment of the 5+1 and the IAEA to achieve such a goal. Therefore, I suggest involving the Arab neighbors of Iran in the next phase of the negotiations with Iran. Their presence this time could open as well other venues of cooperation...