



WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East: Obstacles and Opportunities

The establishment of a weapons of mass destruction (WMD)-free zone in the Middle East is a key international problem that will largely determine the outcome of the NPT Review Conference in 2015. The second attempt to convene a conference on the Middle Eastern WMD-free zone may be undertaken in December 2013. In addition to the traditional differences, the situation is currently being compounded by the events in Egypt and Syria. The conference could become the first real step towards implementing the decision of the 1995 NPT Review Conference, and strengthen the NPT and the entire nuclear nonproliferation regime. Otherwise, all the achievements of the past 18 years in this area may be called into question.

What could be assessed as a success of the conference on the Middle Eastern WMD-free zone? What is the mechanism of the WMD-free zone establishment in this region and what countries will it have to include? How will it be possible to harmonize the attitudes of Israel, Iran, and Arab states concerning the WMD-free zone establishment? What is the link between the WMD-free zone issue and nuclear energy development in the Middle East region?

All these questions were addressed within a set of expert discussions on the future of the WMD-free zone in the Middle East held by the PIR Center during the years 2012–2013. The list of participants included: Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister of Egypt Sameh **Aboul-Enein**; Director of Disarmament and Multilateral Relations of the League of Arab States Wael **Al-Assad**; U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation Thomas **Countryman**; Acting Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security at the U.S. Department of State Rose **Gottemoeller**; Research Fellow of the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (France) Benjamin **Hautecouverture**; Deputy Director General for Strategic Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel Jeremy **Issacharoff**; Director of the Arab Institute for Security Studies (Jordan) Ayman **Khalil**; Facilitator of the Middle East Conference Jaakko **Laajava**; PIR Center President Vladimir **Orlov**; Director of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) at the Monterey Institute of International Studies William **Potter**; Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey **Ryabkov**; Chairman of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs Mohamed **Shaker**; Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the UN and other International Organizations in Vienna Ali Asghar **Soltanieh**; Director-General of the UN Office in Geneva, UN Under Secretary-General and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament Kassym-Jomart **Tokayev**; Director of the Department for Security Affairs and Disarmament in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Mikhail **Ulyanov**.¹

ORLOV: Rapidly unfolding, controversial developments in the Middle East and North Africa seem to be sidelining the search for responses to some fundamental security challenges in the region. Thus the discussion of the steps needed to be taken for preparation and successful conduct of the conference on the WMD-free zone in the Middle East was overshadowed. Furthermore, the environment for such a conference now and in the foreseeable future is not there.

It should be recalled that the decision to hold a conference on the creation of a Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone was made through consensus at the NPT Review Conference of



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2010. Without this decision, it would have been impossible to adopt the Final Document of that conference and the result of a fragile but viable compromise that helped preserve and even strengthen somewhat the architecture of international nuclear nonproliferation regime at a difficult point in time. Equally important is that the aim of establishing a zone free from nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East was recorded in the NPT Review Conference decision in 1995 when the treaty's future including its extension was discussed. There should be no false hopes without the obligation to move forward with freeing the Middle East of nuclear weapons. There would not have been an indefinite extension of the treaty that four decades after it entered into force remains a cornerstone of global stability.

MIDDLE EAST CONFERENCE: LOOKING FOR AN APPROACH

LAAJAVA: Let me introduce 10 conceptual ideas regarding the Middle East WMD-free zone Conference that I use in my activity as conference facilitator.

First, global interconnectedness, the growth of mutual interdependence, and the need to find answers to problems of a global nature call upon all states and regions to engage in peaceful cooperation.

Second, the Middle East region has a vast potential, but faces significant challenges; persistent conflicts, confrontation, and unresolved issues have for a long time characterized many parts of the region. Realities today are equally challenging.

Third, in order to reach its full potential, the region should be perceived as an attractive, increasingly prosperous, and dynamic partner. Therefore the region should experience a gradual movement from confrontation towards dialogue and cooperation, whilst solutions to its problems should be sought urgently. The most straightforward way to achieve progress would of course be direct bilateral talks, but sometimes larger frameworks may be helpful.

Fourth, while much remains to be done in other areas of security as well, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction remain core objectives in the region shared by all.

Fifth, the goal of a Middle East zone free of all of these weapons and their means of delivery enjoys the support of all states in the region. All agree that this is a long-term goal, which cannot be achieved overnight. However, views differ as to how to achieve it, and in what sequence. Some see the need to first achieve peace as a prerequisite to the establishment of the zone. Others emphasize the primacy of the latter as paving the way for peace.

Sixth, the solution to this dilemma in the Middle East circumstances can only be found through the recognition of the intertwined nature of progress in both areas. While arms control in itself seeks to strengthen conditions for peace, it cannot take place in a vacuum and requires a remarkable degree of cooperation between parties. This in turn can only materialize if there is confidence between parties as well as an environment conducive to cooperation.

Seventh, the envisioned conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free from nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction seeks to build on the willingness of the parties to work together towards their shared goal of achieving such a zone. It is to be attended by all states of the region as well as the nuclear-weapon states, and be based on arrangements freely arrived at by the participating regional states. The way forward can only be decided upon by the participants themselves.

Eighth, viewed in a larger perspective, the conference could gradually evolve into a more comprehensive framework for improved security and stability in the whole region and provide an important vehicle for dialogue and cooperation regarding these issues. At the same time, the conference is not supposed to replace any other forum nor substitute for any negotiations, bilateral or multilateral, regarding the region's unresolved problems.

Ninth, the upcoming session of the conference is supposed to mark the beginning of such a longer-term development. It should, at the minimum, provide reaffirmation of the shared goal and for an understanding regarding areas of further work as follow-on steps.

Tenth, while nothing in the realm of security can be posed from the outside, and any change must emanate from the region itself, the conference project could be viewed as an important opportunity for all in the region to engage in a new longer term endeavor in the field of security.

All steps involving commitments in the area of security are risky by nature, but risks can certainly abound if no efforts at all in this direction are being made in the region of the Middle East. As elsewhere the primary responsibility rests at all times with the states of the region themselves who will need to have full control of the steps to be taken at the conference and in the follow-up. At the same time there has to be full support of their efforts by the entire international community.

TOKAYEV: The success of the historic 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference was made possible by a whole package of decisions. An important part of that package was a resolution drafted by the three NPT depository states, i.e. Russia, Britain, and the United States, calling for the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

Today, despite the long delay in that process, we must focus on how we can move forward. The overall goal is a world free of nuclear weapons. A strong NPT is part of the efforts to achieve that goal. A prolonged deadlock over the Conference is simply unacceptable to the international community.

RYABKOV: Russian foreign policy supports initiatives which help implement international tasks and multilateral projects that are designed to strengthen regional and global security. The project to establish a WMD-free zone is undoubtedly one in this class. That is why Russia is actively assisting in establishing the WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

There are still states in the region which have not put their nuclear activities under IAEA safeguards that are not part of the NPT. Some countries remain outside the chemical and biological weapons conventions. The IAEA still has questions as to some countries of the region that are party to the NPT regarding the nature of their nuclear activities.

The prospect for establishing this zone is inseparably linked to the peace process in the Middle East. And there is also the reverse relation—the establishment of such a zone may help achieve a Middle East settlement and create a more favorable atmosphere for that. We do admit that regional security aspects could become the subject of discussion during the conference and during the post-conference period, with the understanding, of course, that the main focus should be on the problems of the zone.

ORLOV: If we procrastinate with the conference on the Middle East this will mean we will put a large question mark over the nonproliferation regime. A lot has been done, especially at the beginning of the 1990s. We should amass everything that was important at that time to implement it, taking into consideration the political climate in the region.

In 1993, Israel and Jordan adopted a declaration on normalizing bilateral relations and they said that they were ready to start establishing a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East in a peaceful environment in the region that will be done under a regime of transparency. As Israel was apprehensive about this, they decided to give an extended definition of the WMD including some traditional weapons in this category. Besides there are UN Security Council resolutions on Iran including sanctions. Moreover, those resolutions bind “a solution to the Iranian nuclear issue” with “the objective of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, including their means of delivery.”²

To speed up this process of bringing in new ideas related to the conference on the Middle East the participants will have to decide to limit the scope of the topics. Many diplomats and experts are apprehensive lest they will have to talk about not only nuclear weapons but about other WMDs and means of their delivery.

Ideally I would like to see this conference taking several decisions that when combined will make it possible for us to introduce measures of trust or at least start creating a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East.

The first decision could be a joint statement by all participants not to attack declared nuclear facilities and not to threaten such attacks. Events around the Iranian nuclear program show us that this is a very urgent issue.



The second decision is to establish a permanent regional confidence-building mechanism in the nuclear area and in the area of chemical and biological weapons and means of their delivery.

The third step should be a road map pointing the way to gradually placing all nuclear facilities in the region under IAEA safeguards. Without Israel it will be impossible. If Israel does not let us put under nuclear safeguards its facility in Dimona, the conference might recommend that all the countries of the region immediately ratify the Additional Protocol to the safeguards in agreement with the IAEA. And Iran could start doing this first.

Step number four, unilateral simultaneous statements by Israel, Egypt, and Iran about their readiness to ratify the CTBT in the near future with practical steps to follow.

The conference could decide, and this is the fifth step, the establishment of an intergovernmental group on drafting a text for the treatment of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East. When developing this agreement all these countries in the region could also sign the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention.

The White Paper “Ten Steps to a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free-Zone in the Middle East” at PIR Center website:
10steps.eng.pircenter.org

All these steps would be a great basis for the 2015 NPT Review Conference. To support this process the PIR Center has prepared and published in March 2013 the White Paper “Ten Steps to a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free-Zone in the Middle East.”

ULYANOV: Frankly, the ideas expressed by Vladimir Orlov are somewhat ambitious and difficult to implement. I think in Helsinki one should aim for a very brave Final Document that would not be ambitious and would contain two main provisions.

First, to confirm the readiness to work towards achieving the long-term objective of establishing a zone. And, second, to establish a relevant mechanism, a committee, or several working groups so that the process could be launched.

All substantive issues could be left until later so that they could be looked into at the expert level and at the conference itself. The main objective is to launch the working process.

GOTTEMOELLER: The United States stands by its commitment to convene the Helsinki conference. We view it as a unique opportunity to foster official dialogue on regional security issues where none currently exists. Since 2010, we have worked and continue to work hand in hand with the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation, and the United Nations to make the conference possible.

The U.S. approach to this conference is based on an objective assessment of the obstacles that must be overcome to make real progress toward ridding the region of weapons of mass destruction. If states approach the conference in a way that hinders the region’s ability to address the underlying and evolving security realities in a consensual way, we will have diminished prospects for a constructive dialogue in Helsinki and will ensure that our shared objectives of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction remains an elusive goal.

First, a conference can only take place if all countries feel confident that it will be carried out in a constructive and balanced matter. They also must know they can attend on an equal basis, regardless of political recognition or their status vis-a-vis the various international arms control treaties. Only the regional parties themselves can provide such confidence. It cannot be granted by conveners or by a facilitator.

Second, for the conference to be constructive, it should set realistic goals and not overreach. Its purpose should not be to start a negotiation but to exchange views on a broad agenda including both regional security and weapons of mass destruction issues such as adherence, verification, compliance, and all categories of weapons of mass destruction and systems for their delivery.

Third, the conference must draw its mandate from the countries in the region in keeping with internationally recognized principles that the region must be based on agreements freely arrived at by the states in the region and should originate from the region itself. Unlike the

zones that are currently in existence, we must acknowledge that the zone in the Middle East will require a level of cooperation, understanding, and mutual confidence that is unparalleled in recent history. A zone cannot be imposed from the outside or mandated by the decision of the NPT Review Conference.

Finally, to ensure the conference takes into account the views of all regional participants, the conference must operate by consensus of the regional participants to include agreement on any further discussions or follow-up actions which logically can only take place with the consent of those countries.

Prospects for a successful and meaningful conference depend on the ability and willingness of the states of the Middle East to lay the groundwork for full participation and a consensus-based approach. That starts by establishing a certain level of trust and credibility, which does not currently exist. This requires direct engagement at official levels, which frankly has been lacking since the 2010 NPT Review Conference closed.

POTTER: I would like to share some observations related to the current WMD Free Zone in the Middle East situation.

First of all, notwithstanding the current controversy surrounding the 2010 NPT RevCon mandated by the Middle East Conference, all of the major parties in the region at one time or another have declared their support for such a WMD-free zone, and also have endorsed the concept that it must be verifiable by means of a regional mechanism.

Second, the consensus Final Document from the 2010 Review Conference is much more fragile than generally appreciated, and may well unravel unless headway is made very soon in implementing the recommendations related to the Middle East. Among other things, this will mean far more pressure being applied by many NNWS [Nonnuclear Weapon States]—and especially those from NAM [the Non Aligned Movement]—who generally held their fire in 2010 on disarmament in deference to the emphasis the NAM Chair Egypt gave to the Middle East.

As such, this is precisely the wrong moment for the P-5 to rest on their laurels, and to congratulate themselves on the progress they are making in their intra-P-5 consultations, at the same time as they collectively boycott the Oslo Conference on Humanitarian Consequences and the organizational meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group. Under these circumstances, they should not be surprised if they get little credit for their work on disarmament at the PrepCom.

Third, unless the P-5 and other members of the international community are prepared to speak out about the failure of a number of members of existing NWFZs to honor fully their legally binding commitments under those zones with respect to prohibition of nuclear trade with countries lacking full-scope safeguards (FSS) or the Additional Protocol (AP), one may ask why one should create additional NWFZs, including one in the Middle East. Zonal members—without exception—must adhere to all provisions of existing zones or be held accountable for noncompliance. Otherwise, the entire NWFZ approach becomes a meaningless exercise.

Fourth, I would like to suggest that we explore new approaches for finding common ground related to the Middle East Conference. That leads us to the topic of disarmament and nonproliferation education and in particular the use of simulations for the purpose of better seeing with the eyes of others, as well as exploring the practicality of alternative solutions to “real world” problems.

The most promising scenario I can imagine is that the delayed Middle East Conference is held in 2013, and everyone comes because no one wants to be held responsible for the chaos likely to infect other international fora if the current stalemate persists. If the conference materializes, realistically the best that we can expect—and not an insignificant achievement—would be for a brief meeting to be held that is devoted mainly to arranging a follow-up mechanism for the next two years before the 2015 NPT Review Conference, along with a reiterated mandate for this extended process. Unfortunately, what may be good in the long term for the region may not be good in the short term for the NPT and its review process, which undoubtedly will suffer significantly if it proves impossible to convene a conference in 2013.



WMD FREE ZONE AND REGIONAL SECURITY

GOTTEMOELLER: Despite the ongoing efforts of Undersecretary Laajava and the conveners, there remain serious divisions in the Middle East region on how to start a constructive dialogue that we hope will begin in Helsinki. These divisions cannot be bridged by any means imposed from outside of the region. The United States cannot guarantee the Conference will happen or that it will be a success, however, we can guarantee that we will continue to work with Undersecretary Laajava and the other conveners to urge the states of the region to engage each other directly, to create the political conditions necessary for a successful meeting.

COUNTRYMAN: The main difficulty is that no one has ever established a zone like this one. In a region where there are always conflicts, where some of the countries do not recognize the existence of their neighbor, this is a very difficult task. It requires a great transparency and communication, which the Middle Eastern states have so far proved unable to provide.

POTTER: A WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East, like NWFZs in other regions, will only be possible if it reflects the perceived national security interests of all of the states in the region to which the zone applies. The zone simply can't be imposed from outside—a principle embodied in the consensus Disarmament Commission Guidelines for NWFZs.

ORLOV: At the beginning of the 1990s an Egyptian expert Nabil Fahmy [from July 2013 the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt—**Ed.**] prepared the proposals of Egypt for a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East. He wanted the Conference to concentrate on nuclear weapons, focusing on establishing a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East. At some stage, when the nuclear-free zone agreement becomes a reality, the countries that will not have signed it will have to sign the chemical weapons convention, which has verification mechanisms. The same applies to the biological convention but there we will have to establish a regional verification mechanism.

The Middle East Conference, even if everyone prepares well, even if everyone participates, will not become a panacea. At maximum it will become a mechanism to implement the decisions of 1995.

HAUTECOUVERTURE: A zone free of WMD in the Middle East can only be the result of a long-term process. This idea often appears to be the way to provide an advance justification to a short-term failure but it simply cannot be different. There are some challenges within this process.

First, unlike existing nuclear-free zones, a Middle East zone would also involve chemical and biological weapons along with means of delivery. That is the scope.

Second, a zone would have to be negotiated where WMD are in place or where acquisition programs are suspected of being developed.

Third, there is no verification protocol for the BWC.

Fourth, several countries within a “would be” zone suffer from historic enmities involving de facto security dilemmas.

Fifth, the Iranian nuclear crisis has become a new factor to take into account in the prospect for a zone in the region since the beginning of this century and events in Syria. The situation in Syria shows us that chemical weapons are neither a fantasy, nor a taboo. Chemical weapons and programs must be erased from the region and this is a matter of urgency, whatever the nuclear issue.

The EU involvement in the WMD Free Zone in the Middle East project comes within two different and complementary frameworks: the Mediterranean and the Middle East zone of cooperation and dialogue and the NPT framework.

The conference on a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East is definitely a challenge for the 2015 NPT Review Conference. It has to be held as soon as possible, but it is a challenge among others within that framework. The real challenge is the regional security realm beyond the NPT cycle of review conferences. The Helsinki Conference will be one piece of a bigger picture then. It is obviously important to stay focused on this goal as an interim step and as a

confidence-building measure per se. But maybe shouldn't we dramatize too much the fact that a conference has not taken place yet.

ISSACHAROFF: In the Middle East there have been two schools of thought. One that you can promote disarmament measures without comprehensive regional peace or other regional security architecture of focus primarily on the nuclear dimension. The second school of thought supports establishing a comprehensive peace in the region, adopting a step-by-step confidence-building measures, and eventually agreeing upon regional security measures based on arrangements freely arrived at by the states in the region. Israel supports the second view because there is no viable alternative in the reality of the Middle East. We cannot talk about putting aside arms and making a zone free of any sort of weapons until you make it a zone that is full of peace, regional security, and stability for all countries. Peace is a vital precursor to any regional strategic reality.

I do not know of any precedent of a WMD free zone in the world. There are precedents of nuclear-weapon-free zones in different areas but these are areas which have far fewer structural problems and problems of stability than the Middle East. We have to remember that the Middle East has been an area where the regional actors have used chemical weapons. Four members of the NPT that have breached the treaty have come from the area. And missiles and rockets were used against Israeli civilians.

The issue of the regional security agenda that we need to focus on is very much wider than what was posited in the 2010 Final Document. How does the idea of the WMDFZ reduce regional tensions and the chances of conventional war and even a low-intensity conflict with high strategic impact? This is the key question that we need to answer. When we talk of war and peace I can't help quoting the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy who said that the strongest of all warriors are these two, time and patience. I would very much urge all to take this into account and to factor this into our consideration.

AL-ASSAD: In 1974, the idea of the WMDFZ in Middle East was first presented to the General Assembly by Iran, and then adopted by Egypt and the Arab States. And after 40 years we are still in the pre-negotiation phase. We have enough good ideas on the issue of the zone. The problem is that they are not being implemented. All we have to do is seriously negotiate the different options we have and agree on it on a political level. Even in the Arab League, in 1996, we established a committee that was specifically assigned to draft a treaty for the zone in the Middle East from an Arab perspective. This committee over the years discussed all the technical and political ideas related to the zone. Of course this separation between the technical and political is always a bit artificial. And we came to the conclusion that it is doable if there is political will behind the idea.

That conference should be the beginning of a process that leads to the creation of the zone. The outcome of the conference should be a road map. The time will never be right, so we have to start now.

A regional, comprehensive approach is the best solution to the problems of the region regarding the nonproliferation issue and it is much better than dealing with those issues on a state-by-state basis. Now the idea of the zone provides the same rules and equal security for everybody, at least this is how we perceived it in the Arab world. The success of the Conference will open doors for other issues related to security in the region.

ABOUL-ENEIN: I would like to say that I agree with many of the points highlighted by the PIR Center in its White Paper headlined "Ten Steps to a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free-Zone in the Middle East." This primarily concerns the proposals about the need to place all the nuclear infrastructure facilities in the region under IAEA safeguards; about the need for closer institutional cooperation between the region's countries to build confidence between the states; and about the need to negotiate a treaty that would serve as the basis of the future WMD-free zone. It is important to make sure that the Conference on the Middle East NWFZ is held under UN auspices, because the role of that organization cannot be ignored.

Neither should we forget about the implementation mechanisms of any agreements that will become elements of the future zone. We have repeatedly faced situations whereby the same treaty is signed and/or ratified by some countries, but not signed and/or ratified by others. Today there is a feeling of disappointment and anger in the Arab world that the process initiated in 1995 has ground to a halt.



SHAKER: For 13 years the technical aspects of the zone were negotiated within a special committee in the Arab League. I hope one day the Arab League will bring out all the *travaux préparatoires*.

At the same time the representatives of Israel made a statement that the time is not right and, moreover, the zone does not fit the culture of the Middle East. It is not only the timing; it is also a substantive objection that the culture of a nuclear weapons-free zone, and that in Africa, Central Asia, and other parts of the world, is not the right culture for the Middle East. This is a very dangerous aspect that has to be dealt with very quickly because it is really a new view on this issue.

First of all, talking about the zone, as Ambassador Al-Assad said, we have to pay attention to technical issues. The policy issues are very important but I think the technical issues may also have an effect on the policy to be adopted.

Then we need to decide who should be in the zone. Are we talking about the Middle East or the Greater Middle East? This is a very important and thorny question, and this was one of the questions that were not settled in the Arab League negotiations and in the Arab League technical committee before it suspended its work since the Riyadh summit in Saudi Arabia.

There was some talk about Turkey, but certainly Turkey is a very active member of the Middle East, plays a very important role, and has very good relations with most of the countries of the region. Now there are problems between Turkey and Syria for obvious reasons. Also, because of Turkey's NATO membership and the presence of the U.S. missile defense system in Turkey, there might be impediments to Turkey's participation in the zone.

There is a question about the status of India and Pakistan within the zone. They are nuclear-weapon powers. We should guarantee that nuclear-weapon powers in Asia would not affect the establishment of a zone or weaken the importance of a zone. Should we have India and Pakistan as participants, or provide them with a special status, maybe offering nuclear limited guarantees to the zone? It is a question to be studied.

We should not forget the CTBT, and it still has a long way to go to become effective. The Chemical Weapons Convention works very well and there are no problems and it is a universal convention. The Biological Weapons Convention has no verification system and that's why in negotiating the treaty for a WMD-free zone we have to discuss the issue of verification for this convention. The success of the negotiations in devising a verification system for the region should help us devise a system worldwide. Achieving a first step in the Middle East in devising a verification system may lead to a universal system of verification of biological weapons.

We will need to create security assurances in the treaty similar to those given by the Security Council in relation to the renewal and extension of the treaty in 1995. A treaty will have to facilitate cooperation between its members and the export control regimes. The treaty should instigate the possibility of a systematic and timely consultation between the export control regime and the parties to the treaty.

If we succeed in having this conference, this will be a breakthrough not only with regard to WMDs but also to peace in the region. It will be the first time when Israelis, Iranians, and Arabs are sitting at one table and negotiating a treaty.

KHALIL: The proliferation of nuclear weapons represents an essential challenge facing the fragile security system of the Middle East. The possession, development, production, deployment, and stockpiling of nuclear weapons would have grave security, political, and environmental consequences.

The process of creation of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East is in great need of a non-conventional proposal, creative reasoning, and thinking outside the box. Obviously Israeli accession to the NPT is not going to be a quick process. And of course the prevailing political circumstances in the Arab world currently prevent any imminent re-launch of security talks.

The condition calling for all states of the region to join treaties prohibiting WMDs is neither mandatory nor necessary. Moreover, when it comes to creating the zone, membership of the NPT should not be an impediment against countries wishing to join the zone.

Innovative technical building measures, innovative technical confidence-building measures are highly needed. For example the exchange of environmental samples is a measure that we foresee, initiation of joint inspections of nuclear facilities, or cooperating and establishing a regional network for airborne radioactive contamination.

No doubt the creation of a WMD-free zone is an important prerequisite to achieving regional stability.

TANGLE OF CONTRADICTIONS: ISRAEL—IRAN—ARAB COUNTRIES

ULYANOV: Iran and Israel are two key countries whose participation in the Middle East Conference is most important. And I would like to hope that both countries will send their delegations to Helsinki. If both Israel and Iran thoroughly analyze the existing situation, they will make the right decisions, because refusal to take part in the conference would hold some unpleasant implications for both countries and some loss of their image will be serious.

Iran's active participation in the conference would meet the interests of Tehran itself. It will be recalled that Iran is one of the authors of the idea of establishing a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East. And if Iran refuses to take part in the conference, this would be viewed and probably would be used as evidence that Iran's nuclear program is not exactly peaceful. So, I think that we might count on Iran's participation.

Much more complicated is the situation with Israel. Israel has a fairly serious argument: the Israeli colleagues have been saying they were not part of the NPT Review Conference, and the decision to convene this proposed conference is not binding. But on the other hand, Israel has an incentive to participate. Tel Aviv, as we know, is concerned very much with the situation in the nuclear nonproliferation sphere. If the proposed conference fails to be convened it will be more difficult to work in this direction. There will be more problems and this will directly and indirectly affect the security of Israel. Participation in the conference would mean for Israel that it could become an *insider* of the process, that it could have a say in the development of the concept of dealing with WMD, that all decisions are to be made on the basis of a consensus with the participation of all countries in the region.

In addition, for Israel, it would be a good opportunity to promote and advance its own agenda on biological and chemical weapons issues, and missiles capable of delivering both conventional and WMD. And finally, Israel has been complaining that it does not have a channel for dialogue with the region. So, Israel has two options. It can isolate itself, or it can actively promote through diplomatic means its ideas for security in the region.

By and large, Israel has only one serious argument against participation—the risk that the conference may turn into a propaganda forum or a battlefield for propagandistic rhetoric and exchange of mutual allegations. This is not to be ruled out. This is a possibility. But there are other platforms for propaganda, like the UN General Assembly or the IAEA. And one would not like to think that such a unique opportunity as the original conference on the Middle East would become yet another platform for propaganda.

It would be important for the Arab countries to send a positive, practical signal that the conference will be conducted in a business-like manner based on mutual respect. How this signal could be sent is up to the Arab states to decide. It would be equally good if Arab and Israeli representatives could establish informal contacts on WMD issues.

ORLOV: Israel is the only country inside the region that has nuclear armaments and in the past 15 years has not come closer to nuclear-free status within the NPT. Moreover, it has not been verifying in any way its nuclear activities. And it is Israel that remains the key destabilizer when we talk about a possible nuclear-free zone in the Middle East.

COUNTRYMAN: It is important to recognize that Israel does not feel obliged to comply with the decisions of the 2010 NPT Review Conference because it is not a member of the NPT. But this remains Israel's right, and its perceptions are not going to change simply because some NGO or some foreign government says that it's in Israel's own interests. Perceptions change when there are efforts to engage and persuade. So far, no such efforts have been undertaken at the official level.



Of course, other regional actors are not ready to make the necessary efforts, either. They say that the only security problem in the Middle East is Israel's arsenals. They don't say anything about the Iranian nuclear program, which violates the NPT, or about the Syrian chemical weapons. Such rhetoric is used for domestic consumption, but it cannot persuade Israel to take part in this process. Furthermore, let us be frank: the United States cannot force Israel to take part in the conference.

HAUTECOUVERTURE: In this context it must be recognized that the 2010 commitment suffers from two fundamental weaknesses: it was formulated in the absence of one major stakeholder in the region; it appears that regional crises have been directly linked to its purpose, which is the final prohibition of WMDs in the region.

Whenever the conference takes place, diplomatic progress in the resolution of the Iranian nuclear crisis is still one of the two keys in order to keep the NPT as the cornerstone of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] crisis being the second one.

The Syrian civil war must come to an end. Paradoxically, these two crises demonstrate to what extent a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East is a compelling need whereas absence of progress in their resolution has made the revival of the process about a zone impossible so far.

Everything appears as if the purpose of a conference has become a poor bargaining chip in regional relations between Israel and the Arab States: "give up your nuclear weapons, we will join the CWC." But it cannot work that way. And this brings us to the agenda of the Helsinki conference. Confidence-building measures, technical measures, cooperation on the ground between scientists, implementation of Resolution 1540 and assistance in law enforcement, export control improvements, nuclear safety and security, multilayered approaches, thematic working groups, etc. The substance of the conference is an issue per se. It needs to be negotiated amongst all the parties.

POTTER: The key players remain conspicuously out of sync. The United States was comfortable with a 2012 date for the conference at the 2010 Review Conference, although a 2013 date reportedly had been proposed by Egypt. Israel condemned the 2012 Middle East Conference the moment the 2010 NPT Review Conference concluded—well before the emergence of the so-called Arab Spring. Nevertheless, it agreed to attend the 2011 IAEA Forum on the Middle East, a meeting Iran chose to boycott. Israel refused to indicate its readiness to attend the Middle East Conference in Helsinki in 2012, a situation that probably was responsible for the last-minute announcement by Iran that it was prepared to attend. Israel agreed to the multilateral consultations in Geneva earlier in 2013 proposed by Mr. Laajava—and Iran also signaled its readiness to attend, but this time Egypt and the other Arab League states refused to participate. Even the three conveners were unable to coordinate their responses to the failure to hold the Helsinki conference in 2012 and hardly conveyed a coordinated approach likely to encourage other key states to defer to their wishes.

Most observers outside of the region do not fully appreciate the frustration on the part of the Arab States, who not only believe correctly that prior promises have not been met, but that the enormous time and energy invested in preparations for the 2012 Conference were largely wasted due to an obstructionist position taken by the one state in the region known to have nuclear weapons. One should not underestimate the changing political dynamic in which Egypt and a number of other key Arab States will be increasingly unresponsive to appeals for patience. As such, although a boycott of the 2013 NPT PrepCom appears to have been avoided, it would be foolhardy to assume that one may not well materialize in 2014 or at the 2015 Review Conference unless a date for the Middle East Conference is set and the meeting actually takes place.

ISSACHAROFF: Transformational changes throughout the Middle East in the Arab world and Iran's nuclear program are going ahead in parallel and have put very great strains on every country's strategic interests in the area. At the same time the 2010 Final Document did not reflect Israel's policy for this regional security approach that we have adopted over the years. In our experience all genuine diplomatic breakthroughs—peace treaties with Egypt, Jordan, and other initiatives—have always emanated from direct consultations between Israel and all the parties. And these contacts have always been the main path to breakthroughs on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at. We need to talk face to face with our Arab neighbors and discuss it.

How do you factor the Iranian situation onto the table? The situation in Syria is equally of great concern to us and I think that it will also be of concern to our Arab neighbors as well. And indeed our very great lack of ability to assess not only what the future is in the long or even medium term but what the future is over the next months.

SOLTANIEH: I am of the strong belief that dialogue and talks in a very open-minded manner and an exchange of views is very essential because we have to learn from each other, to listen to each other. But how can you expect a place like the Middle East to establish a WMD-free zone when Israel says continuously that it is not committed to the NPT, even questions the NPT? At the same time, Iran is in fact a regional proponent of a WMD-free zone since 1974.

Israel keeps thinking that it can resolve the situation by establishing direct contact with a couple of Arab countries. The Middle East issue would be resolved if all the countries were to be directly involved in this matter. This is not the issue of a couple of Arab countries just having informal contacts here and there. Now we have an opportunity of a meeting under the auspices of the UN. If you talk about other things, you jeopardize this new trend.

KHALIL: Despite the declared willingness of all actors in the region, including Iran and Israel, to initiate a WMD-free zone, the Middle East is nevertheless far from achieving this goal. Among the obstacles encountered is a geographic definition of the region; of course another obstacle is basically the scope of prohibition. But the major obstacle is Israel's possession of nuclear capabilities and its strict refusal to sign the NPT. Deterrence has been the driving force and the main motivation for the acquisition of nuclear capabilities. This argument is neither realistic nor logical.

NUCLEAR ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

KHALIL: An important priority facing any country is the development of a sustainable energy supply. Countries in the Middle East are no exception. They are facing the challenge of improving energy security by developing and introducing non-conventional energy sources. In Jordan developing nuclear energy resources would mean sustainable energy resources at lower cost, water security, and overall sustainable development.

ORLOV: The Middle East countries should pay attention to the advantages provided by internationalization of the nuclear fuel cycle. Moreover, the countries in the region need to come up with a mechanism for early warning of a nuclear incident for a region. A regional energy organization without ousting the IAEA could gradually become a conduit for a number of measures necessary in a WMD-free zone.


The experience of the Bangkok Treaty and other nuclear-free zones and regional structures from the European Atomic Energy Community to the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials could be used in establishing a so-called Middle Eastern IAEA.

SHAKER: The establishment of the Middle East WMD-free zone may open up opportunities for intensive cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy. A possible outcome could be the establishment of a regional nuclear fuel cycle, one of the options alluded to by the IAEA expert group report of 2005 on multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle.³ The other way around, regionalization of the nuclear fuel cycle may facilitate the establishment of the zone.

Why don't we internationalize, regionalize the Iranian sensitive technologies, and bring in Arab stakeholders? Iran will keep its initial facilities, but will have partners that will overlook the process and will be there on the board, like in the case of Urenco. This will have the advantage that we will be all watching each other but it will also imply an economy of scale and there will be no need for other countries to develop things that are already there.

Read the interview "Nuclear Energy as a Tool to Promote Peace and Security in the Middle East" with Nikolay Spassky, Deputy Director General of Russia's Rosatom State Corporation, in *Security Index*, No 2, Spring 2013, pp. 5-8.



ORLOV: In conclusion let me mention that no efforts on the part of Russia or other sponsoring states will be crowned with success unless the countries of the region themselves show the will. Cooperation on nuclear energy requires a will for peace in the region and a willingness to rid it of weapons of mass destruction. 

TEN STEPS TOWARDS ESTABLISHING A WMD-FREE ZONE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

- 1) Joint statements by all countries in the region undertaking a commitment not to attack, or to threaten with an attack against each other's declared nuclear facilities placed under the IAEA safeguards.
- 2) Road Map on the gradual placement of all nuclear infrastructure facilities in the Middle East under IAEA safeguards.
- 3) Ratification by all Middle Eastern states of the Additional Protocol to the IAEA Safeguards Agreement.
- 4) Formation of a standing regional mechanism for confidence-building measures with regard to nuclear programs, as well as chemical and biological weapons and some types of delivery systems.
- 5) Ratification by all countries in the region of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.
- 6) An agreement by all Middle Eastern states to ban missiles with a range of more than 3,500 km.
- 7) Formation of an intergovernmental commission to draft the text of the treaty establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. During the drafting of the treaty all countries in the region must join the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.
- 8) Internationalization and regionalization of the nuclear fuel cycle.
- 9) Institutionalization of nuclear cooperation, and establishment of a universal regional body to facilitate such cooperation.
- 10) Establishment of effective regional mechanisms for early warning in the event of a nuclear accident.

The White Paper "Ten Steps to a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free-Zone in the Middle East", PIR Center, 2013, 10steps.eng.pircenter.org

NOTES

¹ The text of this article is based on the materials of the seminar "2012 Conference on the Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction—Searching for a Solution" hosted by the PIR Center on October 4, 2012 in Moscow (see: <http://pircenter.org/en/events/1721-2012-conference-on-the-middle-east-zone-free-of-weapons-of-mass-destruction-searching-for-solutions>), the P5 Conference public event "On the Way to the 2015 NPT Review Conference" co-organized by the PIR Center and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on April 19, 2013 in Geneva (see: <http://pircenter.org/en/events/1798-pir-center-and-the-russian-foreign-ministry-p5-conference-public-event-on-the-way-to-the-2015-a2npt-review-conference>), the launch of the PIR Center's White Paper "Ten Steps to a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free-Zone in the Middle East" on April 25, 2013 in Geneva as a side event at the 2nd Preparatory Committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference (see: <http://pircenter.org/en/events/1801-presentation-of-pir-center-white-paper-ten-steps-towards-a-weapons-of-mass-destructionfree-zone-in-the-middle-east-as-a-side-event-at-the-second-prep-com-for-the-2015-npt-review-conference>).

² UN SC Resolution 1803 (2008).

³ IAEA Doc. INFCIRC 1646, February 22, 2005.