

CHAPTER 7

EXCHANGES ON ESTABLISHMENT OF A ZONE FREE OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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In the absence of superpower support, any nuclear-weapon-free zone initiative — including the one in the Middle East — is unlikely to prove successful.

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Introduction

The 2015 NPT Review Conference (RevCon) is thought to have ended without a consensus final document in large part due to the inability of States parties to the NPT, *inter alia*, Russia and the United States, to resolve their differences over the Middle East. The first warning sign of the disagreement became evident in late November 2012, when Russia and the United States, the co-sponsors of the 1995 Middle East resolution and co-conveners of the Conference, separately announced the decision to postpone the conference.¹ While Russia in its statement highlighted that the new dates for the Conference should be fixed as soon as possible, the United States did not mention any new deadlines, citing the lack of agreement by participating states on 'acceptable conditions' for the conference. Notwithstanding this gap, both Moscow and Washington have repeatedly reiterated

¹ For the statement on behalf of the Russian Federation, see Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2012) 'Press Statement on the 2012 Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction,' available at http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/disarmament/-/asset_publisher/rp0fiUBmANaH/content/id/133378 (19 May, 2021). For the statement on behalf of the United States, see U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson (2012), 'available at (accessed 22/1/2018).<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/11/200987.htm> (19 May, 2021).

their commitment to establishing a weapon-of-mass-destruction-free zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East.

Yet lack of progress on this issue may have damaging implications for the NPT regime at large. In preparation for the 10th NPT RevCon, one should be mindful that 'without a commitment to move towards a nuclear-weapons-free Middle East, there would not have been an indefinite extension of the NPT'.²

To secure a positive outcome of the 10th RevCon, both Russia and the United States will have to address the Middle East issue, and deal with the strong sentiment of dissatisfaction among several Middle Eastern states.³ As the next RevCon approaches, it is important to look back at the history of the U.S.-Russian dialogue on the WMDFZ in the Middle East, which may offer important lessons about the incentives and obstacles to cooperation.

This chapter seeks to revisit the examples of the U.S.-Russian dialogue on the zone through the analysis of the incentives and obstacles to cooperation on the NPT, the specific dimensions of U.S.-Russian cooperation, and the factors contributing to successful cooperation.⁴ Given these parameters, the following paper first focuses on RevCons that bore fruit, and then briefly discusses what went wrong at less productive conferences.

Ideas on the Establishment of a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone in the Middle East

Surprisingly, the first idea to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East was put forward by the Soviet Union. On January 21, 1958, the Telegraph Agency of the *Soviet Union* (TASS)

² Orlov, Vladimir A. (2011) 'A Nuclear-Weapon-Free Middle East: Looking for Solutions'. International Affairs, available at http://www.pircenter.org/kosdata/page_doc/p2533_1.pdf (19 May, 2021).

³ Duarte, Sérgio (2018) 'Unmet Promise: The Challenges Awaiting the 2020 NPT Review Conference,' Arms Control Association, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-11/features/unmet-promise-challenges-awaiting-2020-npt-review-conference> (19 May, 2021).

⁴ These parameters of examining U.S.-Russian cooperation follow the analytical framework suggested by Dr. Lewis A. Dunn, for more see Dunn, Lewis A. (2016) 'Three NPT Snapshots – and Some Lessons and Implications for Rebuilding U.S.-Russian Cooperation' (U.S.-Russian Dialogue on the NPT Review Process: Lessons Learned (1970 – 2015) and Steps Ahead (2016-2020), Geneva, Switzerland, 2016), available at <http://www.pircenter.org/media/content/files/13/14813159450.pdf> (19 May, 2021).

published a proposal to create in the Middle East 'an area free of nuclear and rocket bases'.⁵ The initiative also endorsed the establishment of 'a zone of good neighborliness and friendly cooperation between states' in the Middle and Near East.⁶ However, these ideas did not receive broad support, mostly due to the fact that Washington considered them a political bluff designed to 'weaken the military capabilities of the United States and its allies'.⁷

Sixteen years after the Soviet proposal, and two Arab-Israeli wars, Iran came up with a similar initiative to free the Middle East from nuclear weapons, which opened formal international discussions in 1974. As a result, in the same year, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution 'Establishment of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Region of the Middle East' presented by Egypt and Iran.⁸ 128 countries voted in favour, including the Soviet Union and the United States, while only Israel and Burma abstained.

From 1974 to 1990, the issue of a NWFZ in the Middle East was part of the UN agenda. During the first four NPT RevCons (1975–1990), the NWFZ in the Middle East played a marginal role. Notwithstanding this fact, Arab parties always articulated their misgivings about imbalances in the Middle East with regard to nuclear capabilities. Yet this was not a significant item on the agenda, unlike disarmament. This changed decisively at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference (NPTREC).⁹

⁵ Bloomfield, Lincoln P.; Clemens, Walter C.; Griffiths, Franklyn (1965) Soviet Interests in Arms Control and Disarmament. The Decade Under Khrushchev 1954–1964. Report, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, available at <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/18623846.pdf> (19 May, 2021).

⁶ Orlov, Vladimir A. (2011) 'A Nuclear-Weapon-Free Middle East: Looking for Solutions,' *International Affairs*.

⁷ CIA: Directorate of Intelligence (1984) 'Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zones: Proposals and Prospects,' A Research Paper, Declassified in Part, p.4, available at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84S00895R0002000700004-8.pdf> (19 May, 2021).

⁸ Kareem, Mahmoud (1988) *A Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East: Problems and Prospects*, New York: Greenwood Press, p. 93.

⁹ Müller, Harald (2014) 'The NPT Review Conferences,' *The Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime at a Crossroads*, Institute for National Security Studies, JSTOR, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep08978.5> (19 May, 2021).

1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference

Incentives and Obstacles to Cooperation

Both Russia and the United States had a serious common interest in the NPT and its indefinite extension. Moreover, this interest was reinforced by 'a sense of responsibility for a Treaty that they had jointly played leading roles in creating'.¹⁰

Speaking on the tasks for his delegation, Ambassador Grigory Berdennikov stated, 'the instructions were to work for the indefinite extension'.¹¹ Washington was instructed likewise. Besides, there was an agreement between the five [nuclear weapon states] to push for an indefinite extension.

However, one of the obstacles to indefinite extension by consensus was the position of Egypt and other members of the Arab League that tabled a draft resolution calling for Israel's immediate accession to the NPT and the IAEA safeguards. Egypt took a tough stance, with Amre Mousa saying that the NPT cannot ensure the security of his country until Israel remains *outside* the Treaty.¹²

Dimensions of U.S.-Russian Cooperation

The United States and Egypt as the key protagonists started drafting a mutually acceptable text on the Middle East. In this regard, Amb. Berdennikov said, 'We thought, there was no problem with the side agreements. After all, we voted at the UN for the Middle East NWFZ resolution year after year before the conference'.¹³ While Egypt sought to explicitly name the non-Parties to the NPT in the Middle East, including Israel, the United States could not accept that. Besides, Egypt proposed that the nuclear powers should give special guarantees to the Arab countries in the region. This proposal was not acceptable for both Moscow and Washington. Eventually, the language was changed to urge 'all States of the Middle East that

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Conversation by author with Grigory Berdennikov on February 26, 2019.

¹² Orlov, Vladimir A. (1997) 'Perspektivy meždunarodnogo režima nerasprostraneniya jadernogo oružija vo vtoroj polovine 90-h godov i Konferencija 1995 goda po prodleniju Dogovora o nerasprostranении jadernogo oružija' [Prospects of International Nonproliferation Regime in the second half of the 1990s and 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference], Moscow State University of International Relations.

¹³ Conversation by author with Grigory Berdennikov on February 26, 2019.

have not yet done so' to join the NPT. Given the change of language, Egypt and the other Arab states indicated that they would accept the resolution if someone else sponsored it.

Conference President Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala suggested that the resolution could be sponsored by the three NPT depositaries. Washington sought and received the support of the two other NPT depositaries — the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation — as co-sponsors.¹⁴ Then it also took some time to finalize the language between the three states. Continuing consultations among the three depositaries were characterized by 'real conversations among equal states joined in this responsibility to do Indefinite NPT Extension'.¹⁵ As Dr. Lewis Dunn said, 'In the closing negotiations over the Resolution on the Middle East, U.S.-Russian cooperation was critical — and proved absolutely essential to achieving consensus indefinite extension without a vote'. Ambassador Sergei Kislyak said, 'the 1995 NPTREC serves as a remarkable example of a good partnership between Russia and the United States, how both countries can interact when they have a common interest'.¹⁶

Russia and the United States also met additional two times a week at the meetings of the Five, as countries lobbied for the indefinite extension and exchanged the results.

Regarding the 1995 NPTREC, Sergey Kislyak, the Deputy Head of the Russian delegation said,

We could hardly accept the approach whereby the extension of the NPT was being made conditional on this or another state joining the treaty. At the same time, we share another approach: first we agree to extend the NPT, in everyone's interests, and then on this basis, we work to make sure all the remaining states become involved. My impression is that almost all the Arab countries are quite happy with the resolution we have passed. In the end, the decision to extend

¹⁴ Rauf, Tariq (2000) 'The 2000 NPT Review Conference,' *The Nonproliferation Review* 7, no. 1: P. 146–61, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/10736700008436802> (19 May, 2021).

¹⁵ Dunn, Lewis A. (2016) 'Three NPT Snapshots — and Some Lessons and Implications for Rebuilding U.S.-Russian Cooperation,' *U.S.-Russian Dialogue on the NPT Review Process: Lessons Learned (1970-2015) and Steps Ahead (2016–2020)*, Geneva, Switzerland, available at <http://www.pircenter.org/media/content/files/13/14813159450.pdf> (19 May, 2021).

¹⁶ Conversation by author with Sergei Kislyak on March 27, 2019.

Amb. Roland Timerbaev on the WMDFZ in the Middle East:

I think it was a great error for the United States to allow Israel to become an unofficial nuclear-weapon state. U.S. President Richard Nixon and Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir had a one-on-one conversation in September 1969. There was virtually no one else in the room, so the meeting notes were taken by Nixon himself. These notes will probably never be made available to the general public. But as I understand it, the gist of the conversation was that the Americans agreed to Israel developing its own nuclear weapons on [the] condition that Tel Aviv would always officially deny its possession of such weapons in the international arena. In the end, that is exactly how it happened. Apparently, the Americans would not have been able to secure a ratification of the NPT if they had not agreed to this. The situation with the Israeli nuclear arsenal hinders non-proliferation progress in the Middle East. It also remains the most problematic issue in terms of the decisions taken by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference; no progress has been made at all on that front.



the NPT indefinitely gave us an additional instrument in our dealings with the countries that remain outside the treaty. Now they will not be able to raise some hypothetical scenarios that were possible before the NPT was extended indefinitely.¹⁷

Likewise, Amb. Berdennikov described that the co-sponsors worked 'on the resolution on the Middle East very arduously, especially during the last days. It turned out that for some countries, especially from the Middle East, that it was — I would not use the

¹⁷ Trushkin, Ivan (2011) 'WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East: From Ideas to Reality,' Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security 17, no. 4: P. 55 – 68, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/19934270.2011.609731> (19 May, 2021).

word "a condition," but very desirable — that such a resolution would be adopted so that they would be able to go along with the rest of the package. So, we tried our best and succeeded, and that was very gratifying'.¹⁸ The representative of the U.S. delegation, the Honorable Lawrence Scheinman, Assistant Director, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, announced, 'We all won. This is a Treaty for everybody.... We think this Treaty will be all the more enhanced if every state in the world is party to [it]. The indefinite extension of this Treaty has really enhanced international security, regional security, and the security of states in various localities'.¹⁹

Factors Contributing to Successful Cooperation

In his study, Dr. Dunn explores the factors that contributed to the U.S.-Russian cooperation in 1995: broad U.S.-Russia political-military relationship, institutions, and people.

First, the U.S.-Russia political-military relationship was stable in the mid-1990s, for example, the 'Soviet Nuclear Threat Reduction Act' and START I entered into force, the Megatons to Megawatts Program was initiated, START II and the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances were signed. From a more specific WMDFZ focus, the United States and the Russian Federation took a leading role in organizing Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group events from 1992 to 1995.²⁰

Second, institutional support for nonproliferation and the NPT remained strong both in Moscow and Washington. It was a shared strategic interest in sustaining and strengthening the NPT.

Finally, Dr. Dunn writes about 'robust professional relationships' that had been developed between key U.S. and Russian diplomats, Thomas Graham and Sergei Kislyak. In 1995, the personal relationships between Russia's President Yeltsin and U.S. President Clinton seemed also good (see Chapter 13 for more detail). It is known that

¹⁸ Welsh, Susan B. (1995) 'Delegate Perspectives on the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference,' *The Nonproliferation Review* 2, no. 3: P. 1–24, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/10736709508436589> (19 May, 2021).

¹⁹ Welsh, Susan B. (1995) 'Delegate Perspectives on the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference,' *The Nonproliferation Review* 2, no. 3: P. 1–24, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/10736709508436589> (19 May, 2021).

²⁰ Yaffee, Michael D. (2001) 'Promoting Arms Control and Regional Security in the Middle East,' *Disarmament Forum*, P. 17, available at https://www.peacepalacelibrary.nl/ebooks/files/UNIDIR_pdf-art67.pdf (19 May, 2021).

in Moscow, January 12–15, 1994, Clinton and Yeltsin discussed measures on cooperation in preventing nuclear proliferation, and the situation in the Middle East.²¹ Both Presidents appealed to the Conference to make the NPT permanent. Thomas Countryman, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation, believes that one of the factors for the successful 1995 NPTREC and the adoption of the Middle East resolution was Clinton's personal desire to reach consensus on NPT's indefinite extension.²²

2000 NPT Review Conference

In this section the results of the 2000 NPT RevCon are omitted, as there were few steps forward regarding the Middle East resolution. In the general debate during the conference, neither Moscow nor Washington addressed the issue of the MEWMDFZ, yet both states expressed dissatisfaction with Iraq's implementation of the safeguards agreement with the IAEA. By 2000, the United Arab Emirates, Djibouti and Oman acceded to the NPT, which meant that all Middle Eastern states became parties to the Treaty, with the exception of Israel. The states of the Arab League wanted Israel to be called upon by name to accede to the NPT. As a result, Israel was named in the part of regional issues of the Final Document.²³ This step could be regarded as a manifestation of Moscow's and Washington's continuing efforts on the universalization of the NPT. Though the decision on including this language was much dependent on the U.S., Thomas Countryman said that the final document was adopted because President Clinton wanted to have a successful conference although there was no pressure for the extension of the Treaty.

²¹ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian (2000) 'Chronology of U.S.-Russia Summits, 1992 – 2000,' available at https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/nis/chron_summits_russia_us.html (19 May, 2021).

²² Conversation by author with Thomas Countryman on March 22, 2019.

²³ Simpson, John; Elbahtimy, Hassan, eds. (2018) NPT Briefing Book, 2018 Edition, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey; King's College London, available at <https://www.nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/npt-briefing-book-2018.pdf> (19 May, 2021).

2010 NPT Review Conference, Glion and Geneva

Incentives and Obstacles to Cooperation

President Obama's speech in Prague carried a political message that would be important for both the U.S.-Russia strategic relations and for the 2010 NPT RevCon. Negotiations on the New START and the U.S. plans to submit the CTBT to the Senate for ratification provided another significant incentive for cooperation. A desire to avoid successive failure of the RevCon also played a role.

In the run-up to the 2010 NPT RevCon, Russia and the United States, along with other Middle East Quartet mediators, sought to promote the negotiating process in the Middle East. However, the security environment in the region remained unstable. In response to the Iranian nuclear program in 2006, Russia and the United States interacted in the P5+1 format. Besides, both countries voted in favor of several UN Security Council Resolutions requiring Iran to suspend its enrichment program and verify its compliance with the IAEA Board of Governor's requirements. Despite this unanimity in the Security Council, Moscow and Washington were split on the issues of U.S. missile defense (MD) that included sites in Poland and the Czech Republic and, to a lesser extent, of Russia's S-300 contract with Iran.²⁴

In 2009, during the preparation for the upcoming NPT RevCon, Russia came up with a number of initiatives for the region, for instance, it encouraged all states in the region to accede to the CTBT, and to abandon the creation and development of sensitive elements of the nuclear fuel cycle (NFC).²⁵ Besides, Russia also stated that it supports holding a conference to 'consider the prospects' for implementing all aspects of the resolution, but would like such a conference to address all WMD.²⁶ These ideas and approaches helped reinvigorate the discussion.

²⁴ Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy (2009) 'Fm Lavrov Discusses Missile Defense and Iran with Codel Levin,' Russia, Moscow, available at https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09MOSCOW1111_a.html (19 May, 2021).

²⁵ Orlov, Vladimir A. (2011) 'A Nuclear-Weapon-Free Middle East: Looking for Solutions,' International Affairs, available at http://www.pircenter.org/kosdata/page_doc/p2533_1.pdf (19 May, 2021).

²⁶ Kerr, Paul K.; Nikitin, Mary Beth (2010) '2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference: Key Issues and Implications,' in Congressional Research Service, p. 33, available at <https://fas.org/spp/crs/nuke/R41216.pdf> (19 May, 2021).

Dimensions of U.S.-Russian Cooperation

There were reasons for optimism regarding the upcoming 2010 Rev-Con. Senior American and Russian diplomats interacted on a regular basis, and the issue of the WMDFZ in the Middle East was top of their agendas. For instance, the issue of Iran was discussed at the meetings between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. senators, headed by Carl Levin, the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. During one of their talks, Lavrov commended the new U.S. approach to Iran, welcoming President Obama's readiness to engage in talks with Iran. 'Senator Levin said that Russia had taken a practical and pragmatic step with the suspension of the sale of S-300 missiles to Iran. This helped make Israel less nervous, and sent a message to Iran that the U.S. and Russia were working more closely together on Iran issues'.²⁷

The U.S.-Russia Binational Commission's Arms Control and International Security Working Group opened up another opportunity for dialogue. In this context, Ellen Tauscher, then Under Secretary for Arms Control, discussed a Middle East WMDFZ with Sergey Ryabkov, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister. Speaking on the Middle East Resolution, Ryabkov said it would be destructive for the NPT regime if there was no progress on this issue and suggested holding another P5 discussion. Ryabkov restated Russia's position that 'all states in the region should be in compliance with the NPT, all states should accede to the NPT, and all nuclear facilities should be under safeguards'. Tauscher said 'the U.S. was working closely with Egypt to find a way forward. The U.S. would support approaches at the RevCon that were consultative, positive, and which did not cause participants to take sides'.²⁸

While negotiating a New START, both countries spent some time exchanging their views on the Middle East. For instance, Undersecretary for Arms Control and International Security. Tauscher shared the results of her talks with Egypt with Ambassador Anatoly Antonov. Tauscher said she wanted to find a consensus language regard-

²⁷ Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy (2009) 'Fm Lavrov Discusses Missile Defense and Iran with Codel Levin,' Russia, Moscow, available at https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09MOSCOW1111_a.html (19 May, 2021).

²⁸ Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy (2009) 'U.S.-Russia Arms Control and International Security Working Group Meeting, Moscow, October 12,' Russia, Moscow, available at https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09MOSCOW2696_a.html (19 May, 2021).

ing the WMDFZ in the Middle East, 'in a way that provided them [the Egyptians] with a political benefit but was not harmful to Israel. With regard to determining the language on a Middle East nuclear-weapons-free zone, she said her Egyptian counterpart agreed that technical teams would meet soon to discuss and resolve the issue'.²⁹ Antonov said he was sure that Russia had the same goals as the U.S. for the RevCon and that he wanted a unified P5 position. Tauscher agreed and said a unified statement would be characteristic of our new relationship with Russia. Additionally, Antonov emphasized that it was better to be unified on a sensitive issue like the Middle East, suggesting the U.S. have a closer look at Russia's proposal from the third session of the PrepCom. In the 2009 PrepCom, Russia tabled the list of ideas on how to get away from merely repeating slogans such as 'we support the 1995 resolution' and put forward concrete action: 'to hold an international conference or a meeting involving all the parties concerned to consider the prospects of implementing the Resolution on the Middle East,' and to appoint 'a special coordinator authorized to hold consultations on this issue with countries in the region and make a report about the progress of this work during the review process'.³⁰ Antonov added that Russia does not want to isolate Israel.

Several months later, Philip Gordon, then U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, said that 'Russia has been a useful peace process partner, playing a positive role in the Quartet, and reinforcing U.S. messages in the region'. He acknowledged that both countries had different views on their engagement with Hamas, Damascus, and Tehran. Assistant Secretary Gordon added that 'Russia's improved relations with Israel, with whom it now has a visa-free regime and a vigorous strategic dialogue, which has moved Moscow beyond its reflexively pro-Arab stance of Soviet days'.³¹

Amb. Berdennikov recognizes that the negotiations on the WMDFZ between Russia and the United States, as well as within the P5, have

²⁹ Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy (2009) 'Start Follow-on Negotiations, Geneva: Tauscher Meeting with Russian Start Head of Delegation Antonov, December 9, 2009,' Switzerland U.S. Mission in Switzerland, available at https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09GENEVA1203_a.html (20 May, 2021).

³⁰ 'Statement by the Russian Delegation at the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 NPT Review Conference' (2009), New York, available at http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom09/statements/8MayME_Russia.pdf (19 May, 2021).

³¹ Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy (2009) 'Scenesetter for Visit of Assistant Secretary Gordon,' Russia Moscow, available at https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09MOSCOW2298_a.html (19 May, 2021).

never been more intensive than in the run-up to the 2010 RevCon. Despite the agreed position among the P5 that 'Egypt must be offered something in this review cycle,'³² Thomas Countryman said that the talks with the Egyptians at the 2010 NPT RevCon were tough, but a good compromise was reached.³³ Dr. Chen Kane believes that there was the U.S.-Egyptian agreement intended to facilitate a consensus text for the 2010 NPT RevCon. According to the agreement, Egypt was to get 'Iran to agree on the consensus document in exchange for the United States promising to launch the 2012 conference'.³⁴

Despite the fact that the United States gave Israel regular updates on the negotiations, Israel was outraged by the Final Document that had been adopted by the 2010 NPT RevCon on a regional process.

According to Dr. Bernd Kubbig, the 2010 NPT Final Document required compromises by all leading actors, including Cairo, Tehran, and Washington, yet for the Israeli government, 'the Helsinki Mandate was born in sin'.³⁵ After the Final Document was agreed upon, Israel made a statement: 'As a non-signatory state of the NPT, Israel is not obligated by the decisions of this conference, which has no authority over Israel. [...] Given the distorted nature of this resolution, Israel will not be able to take part in its implementation'.

The 2012 Conference and the Informal Multilateral Consultation Process

Incentives and Obstacles to Cooperation

Speaking at the PIR Center seminar on the 2012 Conference, leading Russian and the U.S. diplomats reaffirmed that they stand by their commitment to convene the conference. Nevertheless, both states

³² Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy (2009) 'Discussed at P-5 Lunch in New York' United Nations (New York), available at . (20 May, 2021).

³³ Conversation by author with Thomas Countryman on March 22, 2019.

³⁴ Kane, Chen (2012) 'Bad Timing but Still Some Hope,' in The 2012 Conference on a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone in the Middle East, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, available at https://www.nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/120731_mideast_wmdfz_conf_roundtable.pdf (20 May, 2021).

³⁵ Kubbig, Bernd W.; Weidlich, Christian (2015) 'A WMD/DVs Free Zone For The Middle East. Taking Stock, Moving Forward Towards Cooperative Security,' Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Academic Peace Orchestra Middle East, Frankfurt, available at <http://academicpeaceorchestra.com/gui/user/downloads/A%20WMD-DVs%20Free%20Zone%20For%20The%20Middle%20East.pdf> (20 May, 2021).

acknowledged the challenges they were facing. Rose Gottemoeller, however, noted that 'there remain serious divisions in the 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'.³⁶ Ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov said that not all countries confirmed that they would participate in the Conference, meaning Israel and Iran.³⁷

There are also views that neither Egypt nor the United States were ready for the 2012 Conference. For instance, then Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi had been in power for a month, while it was presidential election season in Washington.³⁸ From Israel's perspective, the conference was too closely tied to the NPT process, which could complicate efforts by Israel and Egypt to find common ground on the nuclear issue.³⁹ After Thomas Countryman was appointed as U.S. Assistant Secretary for International Security and Nonproliferation in 2011, his first task was to reconcile the U.S. President and the Israel Prime Minister.⁴⁰ So he tried to work out a formula to engage Israel in the Conference and start a security dialogue.

Dimensions of U.S.-Russian Cooperation

The first session of the PrepCom for the 2015 NPT RevCon gave little reason for optimism. The head of the U.S. delegation, Thomas Countryman said:

³⁶ Gottemoeller, Rose (2012) Speech at the PIR Center's International Seminar on WMDfz in the Middle East, available at <http://pircenter.org/en/events/1721-2012-conference-on-the-middle-east-zone-free-of-weapons-of-mass-destruction-searching-for-solutions> (10 May, 2021).

³⁷ Ulyanov, Mikhail (2012) Speech at the PIR Center's International Seminar on WMDfz in the Middle East, available at <http://pircenter.org/en/events/1721-2012-conference-on-the-middle-east-zone-free-of-weapons-of-mass-destruction-searching-for-solutions> (20 May, 2021).

³⁸ Kane, Chen (2012) 'Bad Timing but Still Some Hope,' in The 2012 Conference on a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone in the Middle East, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, available at https://www.nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/120731_mideast_wmdfz_conf_roundtable.pdf (20 May, 2021).

³⁹ Kaye, Dalia Dassa (2012) 'Focus on Renewing the Regional Security Dialogue,' in The 2012 Conference on a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone in the Middle East, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, available at https://www.nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/120731_mideast_wmdfz_conf_roundtable.pdf (20 May, 2021).

⁴⁰ Conversation by author with Thomas Countryman on March 22, 2019.

Just as our efforts to seek peace and security in a world without nuclear weapons will not be realized quickly, we understand that a WMD free zone in the Middle East can only be achieved once essential conditions are in place, most critically a comprehensive and durable peace and full compliance by all countries in the region with their nonproliferation obligations.[...].⁴¹

In May 2012, the co-conveners of the Conference met in Helsinki. At that meeting, Russia made a proposal to hold informal consultations between the Middle Eastern states, but this proposal, for some reason, was not accepted by the U.S. till the beginning of 2013.

In fall 2012, the agenda was not agreed upon, and the UN Secretary-General could not issue official invitations without all states in the Middle East indicating in advance their readiness to attend. Consequently, the postponement of the Middle East conference was announced, causing considerable disagreement between Russia and the United States. Thomas Countryman recalls that it was possible to convene the 2012 Conference as scheduled but without Israel. He was confident that the Conference without Israel would not bear fruit.⁴²

Dr. Kubbig believes that in the Helsinki preparation process, both Washington and Moscow sided with the respectively opposed 'camps': Washington continued to play the role of a protector of Israel and its interests, whereas Moscow supported the proposals put forward by Egypt. Russia's position was that it had been consistently pursuing the goal of implementing its 1995 Middle East Resolution mandate.

During the 2013 PrepCom, it seemed that the gap between Russia and the United States was widening further. Thomas Countryman made it very clear that for his country an agenda 'cannot be dictated from outside the region — it must be consensual among the States who must live with the agenda'. Mikhail Ulyanov stated that it was necessary to engage in multilateral consultation with the participation of all states of the Middle East without delay. The Russian diplomat emphasized that the preparation process of the Conference

⁴¹ Kubbig, Bernd W.; Weidlich, Christian (2015) A WMD/DVs Free Zone For The Middle East. Taking Stock, Moving Forward Towards Cooperative Security, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Academic Peace Orchestra Middle East, Frankfurt, available at <http://academicpeaceorchestra.com/gui/user/downloads/A%20WMD-DVs%20Free%20Zone%20For%20The%20Middle%20East.pdf> (20 May, 2021).

⁴² Conversation by author with Thomas Countryman on March 22, 2019.

should be shifted to a multilateral format, as bilateral contacts alone were not enough.⁴³

However, new developments brought some hope. The United States and Russia acted in concert after the use of chemical weapons in Syria in August 2013, made Syria join the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and destroyed its respective stockpile. Starting in October 2013, the conveners engaged in five rounds of multilateral consultations with regional states in informal meetings in Glion and Geneva. Thomas Countryman referred to those meetings as official enough for the Arab states and unofficial enough for Israel.

Russia had to persuade the Arab states to engage in informal negotiations in Glion, while the United States encouraged Israel to participate. During three meetings in Glion and two in Geneva a dialogue was established. However, the Arabs and the Israelis did not talk to each other directly, preferring communication through the co-conveners, yet they were able to get across what their positions were. During the second Glion meeting, Israel said that it would be ready to set a date for the Conference after the agenda and outcome document are outlined.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, those favourable circumstances were not used to develop coordinated approaches. Soon, the drafting work was halted by the United States.

There are different regional views on Glion and Geneva. From an Arab point of view, it was 'restaurants, coffee shop diplomacy', where the Israeli representative reminded everyone that Israel was a non-NPT nation, and therefore was not obligated by a decision in a forum it had not acceded to. Hence, the Israeli representative refused any reference or relationship to the UN and the NPT. The Arabs wanted to hold the meetings in UN premises under a UN flag, but they were still ready to attend any meeting with terms of references that were symbiotically linked to the 2010 mandate.⁴⁵

⁴³ 'Statement by Mikhail Ulyanov on Convening the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and All Other Weapons of Mass Destruction and Their Means of Delivery at the Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT' (2013), available at http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom13/statements/29April_Russia.pdf (20 May, 2021).

⁴⁴ Conversation by the author with senior Russian diplomats on April 3, 2019.

⁴⁵ Karem, Mahmoud (2014) 'The 2010 NPT ME Conference: A Historical Recount of Its Stalled Diplomatic Unfolding; and Final Outcome,' WMD and Security Forum, Amman, Jordan.

Israel engaged with the informal consultations because at that point of time they did not feel they had another choice and it could serve best their interests. The United States supported the process, despite an Israeli-U.S. agreement prior to the 2010 RevCon that there would not be a decision to establish a process, and the two governments were already at odds on other issues related to the peace process and Iran. As a result, Israel decided that there were more important issues Israel needs U.S. support for and refrained from straining U.S.-Israel relations even further. Nevertheless, the Israeli negotiator was acting under very strict instructions from Prime-Minister Netanyahu on his mandate and reported to him before and after each round. In many ways, Israel felt that it has nothing to lose by participating in the negotiations because they were informal.⁴⁶

Despite these different regional perspectives, both Russia and the United States believe that the informal multilateral consultation process in Glion and Geneva produced some progress. First, Israel and the Arab states sat together five consecutive times. Second, the working relationship between the parties was established.

Factors Contributing to Successful Cooperation

First, the U.S.-Russia political-military relationship was normal in the early 2010s. Besides, there were unique channels for dialogue such as the *U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission* and the U.S.-Russia Binational Commission's Arms Control and International Security Working Group. From a more specific WMDFZ focus, the Russian Federation and the United States interacted intensively through the P-5, P5+1, and the *Middle East Quartet*. Both countries made it clear that the Middle East was an important item on their agendas.

Second, there was a shared strategic interest in sustaining and strengthening the NPT. Moreover, both states understood the importance of the WMDFZ problématique, as it was rightly put by Ambassador Thomas Graham, Jr., who told the participants at a June 2011 conference in Washington, D.C., 'The [NPT] will stand or fall depending on how the issue of nuclear proliferation is managed in the Middle East in the coming years'.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Conversation by author with Chen Kane on April 2, 2019.

⁴⁷ Shaw, Douglas B. (2012) 'Middle East Nonproliferation,' *The Nonproliferation Review* 19, no. 3 : P. 357 – 63, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/10736700.2012.734184> (20 May 2021).

Finally, personnel policy and professional relationships also contributed to cooperation. For instance, President Obama's selection of George Mitchell as the Middle East envoy showed his dedication to resolving the Iran issue diplomatically.⁴⁸ Sergey Ryabkov emphasized, 'We are not in a zero-sum game'. Anatoly Antonov supported the view that the P-5 must be united going into 2010 adding, 'We should forget our bilateral problems and make an agreement not to attack each other'.⁴⁹ Overall, this phase of U.S.-Russian interaction on the MWDFZ in the Middle East can be characterized by the words of Ambassador Antonov, 'business is business'.⁵⁰

With regard to the professional relationships, it is important to highlight the efforts of PIR Center that organized a seminar on the 2012 Conference on the MEWMDFZ in fall 2012. Senior diplomats from all relevant states attended the event and were openly sharing their opinions and concerns regarding the zone. Such kind of events represents a unique opportunity for diplomats to talk to each other in an unofficial environment, to be more open to innovative approaches offered by their colleagues or independent experts present at these meetings.

Results of the 2005 and 2015 Review Conferences

When one analyses successful and unsuccessful NPT RevCons, the analogy of Leo Tolstoy comes to mind, 'Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way'.

The collapse of the 2005 NPT RevCon was largely attributable to Egypt's and the Arab states' frustration over the lack of progress on the 1995 Resolution and skepticism about the commitment of the co-sponsors. Though the U.S.-Russia political-military relationship was not on the level of 1995 or 2000, it was not as bad as in 2015. Thomas Countryman sees the major factor provoking the failure of the 2005

⁴⁸ Guardian (2010) 'U.S. Embassy Cables: Egypt Turned down Nuclear Weapons after Collapse of Soviet Union, Washington Told,' The Guardian, sec. World news, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/206843> (20 May, 2021).

⁴⁹ Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy (2009) ' Discussed at P-5 Lunch in New York ' United Nations, New York, available at . https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09USUNNEWYORK522_a.html (20 May, 2021).

⁵⁰ Arms Control Association (2010) 'Remarks of Assistant Secretary Rose Gottemoeller at the ACA Annual Meeting,' available at . (20 May, 2021).

RevCon in the diplomatic approach of then Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, John Bolton, who was unwilling to compromise and took a hostile approach to arms control agreements that appeared to constrain America's freedom of action. The United States entered the 2005 review determined not to compromise on disarmament and to demand much stronger nonproliferation measures, including export controls, harsh penalties in case of treaty withdrawal, strong sanctions against wrongdoers, and stricter verification.⁵¹

As a result, P5 failed to issue a joint statement, mainly due to the U.S. hostility to a paragraph endorsing CTBT entry into force. The Bush administration made it clear that it had no interest in the Middle East Resolution and was complacent regarding Israel's nuclear weapons. The U.S. delegation declared that the results of the 2000 NPT RevCon were irrelevant as they had been accepted by a previous U.S. administration and therefore were not binding on the present one. This declaration constituted an unprecedented devaluation of the entire institution of review.

The United States, for instance, proclaimed, 'Today, the Treaty is facing the most serious challenge in its history due to instances of noncompliance' notably by North Korea and Iran, and by non-state actors.⁵² It continued to say, 'Iran has made clear its determination to retain the nuclear infrastructure it secretly built in violation of its NPT safeguards obligations'.⁵³ On Iran, Russia called 'for current negotiations and consultations to provide such decisions with regard to Iran's nuclear program that would meet the country's legitimate energy needs on the one hand and dispel doubts as to the peaceful nature of its nuclear activities on the other'.

Regarding the 2015 NPT RevCon, it is believed that 'instead of maintaining traditional nuclear weapon-state solidarity, Russia sided with Arab delegations on the contentious Middle East nuclear-free-zone issue in the hope of isolating the United States and putting

⁵¹ Müller, Harald (2014) 'The NPT Review Conferences,' *The Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime at a Crossroads*, Institute for National Security Studies, JSTOR, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep08978.5> (20 May, 2021).

⁵² Johnson, Rebecca (2005) 'Politics and Protection: Why the 2005 NPT Review Conference Failed,' Acronym Institute, available at <http://www.acronym.org.uk/old/archive/textonly/dd/dd80/80npt.htm> (20 May, 2021).

⁵³ Ibid.

the onus on Washington for blocking consensus'.⁵⁴ From the Russian perspective, Russia has always taken actions to implement the mandate of the 1995 Resolution and the 2010 Final Document. Russia has always been supportive of the idea of convening a Conference on a set date. In its turn, Moscow believes that Washington only simulates its activities regarding the Middle East Resolution. When it comes to a concrete step, for instance, to convene a Conference, they usually refrain from action.

As one can see, it has turned into an exchange of mutual accusations. However, it is important to realize that the 2015 RevCon fallout while officially was because of the Zone, was in fact a manifestation of much deeper disagreements between Russia and the United States.⁵⁵

Study of Russian and U.S. Proposals

For the 2017 PrepCom, Russia introduced its working paper on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.⁵⁶ The key points are the following:

- the mandate of the 2010 action plan is valid, and the convening of a Conference on the establishment of MEWMDFZ remains a relevant, worthwhile and achievable goal;
- all decisions on substantive matters at the Conference and within the framework of its Preparatory process should be taken on the basis of consensus;
- participation of all the States of the region without exception is desirable;
- a Conference should be held well before the 10th RevCon;
- it is advisable to devote one session of the Conference to several specific aspects of regional security.

⁵⁴ Einhorn, Robert (2016) 'Prospects for U.S.-Russian Nonproliferation Cooperation,' Task Force on U.S. Policy Toward Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/02/26/prospects-for-u.s.-russian-nonproliferation-cooperation/iujh> (20 May, 2021).

⁵⁵ Potter, William C. (2016) 'The Unfulfilled Promise of the 2015 NPT Review Conference,' *Survival*, Volume 58, 58, no. 1: P. 151 – 78, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1142144> (20 May, 2021).

⁵⁶ Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction (2017) 'Working Paper Submitted by the Russian Federation,' Vienna, available at <http://undocs.org/NPT/CONF.2020/PC.I/WP.31> (20 May, 2021).

At the 2018 PrepCom, the United States tabled its proposal on establishing regional conditions conducive to a Middle East free of WMD and delivery systems.⁵⁷ The key points are as follows:

- the United States remains convinced that the task of creating a WMD-free zone in the Middle East is fundamentally a regional task that must be pursued by the regional states concerned through direct, inclusive, and consensus-based dialogue;
- the United States would not support any proposals regarding a Middle East WMDFZ that lacked the consent of all the regional states concerned;
- discussion of the prevailing security conditions and concerns of all parties must be at the center of any meaningful dialogue on a Middle East WMD-free zone;
- the NPT review cycle cannot be the primary mechanism for progress on a Middle East WMDFZ;
- a more productive avenue for advancing the implementation of the 1995 Resolution would be for regional states to redouble their efforts, both on a voluntary basis and in dialogue with other regional states, to establish the security, political, and diplomatic conditions needed for a MEWMDFZ.

Russia and the United States are obviously split on four issues regarding the zone. First, while Russia stresses the importance of convening the Conference, the U.S. considers recommendations on the Middle East contained in the 2010 RevCon Final Document (Helsinki mandate) no longer an appropriate basis for action. Second, the countries disagree on the role of the co-sponsors in the establishment of a zone. Third, Moscow and Washington have some differences regarding agenda: WMD issues or security concerns. Though Russia agrees that regional security should be addressed, this topic cannot be at the center of a dialogue. Finally, Moscow disagrees that the NPT review process is not the most suitable format to discuss the WMDFZ issue. It reminds that the Resolution on the Middle East was adopted at the 1995 NPTREC, where the NPT was extended indefinitely.

Speaking on the U.S. reaction to the 2017 Russian working paper, Dr. Chen Kane noted that the U.S. could not support it because it

⁵⁷ Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (2018) 'Working Paper Submitted by the United States of America,' Establishing Regional Conditions Conducive to a Middle East Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Delivery Systems, Geneva, available at <https://undocs.org/NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.33> (20 May, 2021).

represented a position that the Conference can take place outside of the region, without Israel and make decision on its behalf. The United States supported the Israeli position that the process needs to be regional in nature and not managed by the UN; that decisions need to be adopted by consensus by all regional states, with their participation.⁵⁸

In fact, the Arab countries and Iran found Russia's working paper too 'pro-Israel'.⁵⁹ Washington dislikes the fact that the Russian proposal requires real action, rather than mere discussions. Russia believes that it is important to talk about regional security, as it is the only way to encourage Israel to participate. However, Russia's position is that neither Israel nor Washington have showed considerable interest in seriously addressing the issue of the WMDFZ in the Middle East since the 2015 RevCon.

Preparing for the 10th NPT Review Conference

There are not so many reasons for optimism. In his remarks at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, Ambassador Antonov emphasized that the relations between Russia and the United States were in dire straits, and high-level interaction between Russian and U.S. officials was halted. Hence, Antonov was skeptical about the progress on the Middle East at the next RevCon.

Similarly, Thomas Countryman did not expect progress on the WMDFZ. He believes that at the 10th NPT RevCon there will be more 'dangers' to the NPT review process than the WMDFZ. For instance, he mentioned the fact that Russia and the United States were going in the wrong direction on disarmament.⁶⁰

Sergey Kislyak was pessimistic about any breakthrough as well. He pointed out that new U.S.-Israel relations, meaning the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the U.S. Embassy's move to Jerusalem, missile defense system exercises, and the recognition of the Golan Heights, could only harm the regional stability and peace. Hence, it was clear the Trump administration would not push Israel to any steps towards the WMDFZ.⁶¹

Grigory Berdennikov thought that the consensus language on the WMDFZ can be reached, containing solely words and intentions, but no real actions.

⁵⁸ Conversation by author with Chen Kane on April 2, 2019.

⁵⁹ Conversation by the author with Russian diplomats on April 4, 2019.

⁶⁰ Conversation by author with Thomas Countryman on March 22, 2019.

⁶¹ Conversation by author with Sergey Kislyak on March 27, 2019.

Chen Kane believed that at times when the United States and Russia found it necessary to cooperate, they managed to insulate specific topics and work on them together. But those were issues that were important to both countries, like Syrian chemical weapons. While Russia wanted to protect President Assad against a U.S. attack, the United States was satisfied with a disarmament success without the need to employ its military. However, the WMDFZ issue is not a top priority for either country and given it is not a top priority for any of the relevant Middle Eastern countries (Egypt, Israel, or Iran), 'the U.S. and Russia will not "waste" political and diplomatic capital more than needed to do the minimum needed as NPT depository states'.⁶²

Finally, Ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov supposed that since 2015 the only decision to advance a Middle East WMDFZ was the UN General Assembly decision to entrust to the Secretary-General the convening, no later than 2019, of a conference on establishing a zone. Though Ambassador Ulyanov did not find this option optimal, as it does not ensure the participation of the United States and Israel, this decision helped move from words to actions. Ambassador Ulyanov expected the debate on the MWDFZ at the 10th RevCon to be less fierce because the conference under the UN umbrella was held, so the process of implementing the 1995 and 2010 mandates was launched.

Speaking at a VCDNP seminar in Vienna, Dr. Bernd W. Kubbig stated that the UN GA decision 'aims at taking the controversial WMD issue out of the NPT framework in order to save the NPT Process and the NPT RevCon'.⁶³ Thomas Countryman believed that the 2019 Conference without the United States and Israel was a 'PR' show for some delegations. Or the U.S. delegation can be unwilling to address the WMDFZ at the 10th RevCon citing the UN GA decision.

Having identified the examples of successful interactions and obstacles, it is possible to offer some recommendations.

1. It is certain that the Middle East will not be free of WMD until a serious and concerted effort is begun.⁶⁴ In this regard, the three conveners may be required to make the establishment of a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East a higher priority on their

⁶² Conversation by author with Chen Kane on April 2, 2019.

⁶³ Finaud, Marc; Kubbig, Bernd W. (2018) 'Cooperative Ideas: Overcoming the Stalemate on a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East,' VCDNP, available at <https://vcdnp.org/cooperative-ideas-overcoming-the-stalemate-on-a-wmd-free-zone-in-the-middle-east/> (20 May, 2021).

⁶⁴ Lewis, Patricia; Potter, William C. (2011) 'The Long Journey Toward a WMD-Free Middle East,' *Arms Control Today* 41, no. 7: P. 8 – 14, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23629110> (20 May, 2021).

foreign policy agendas and to demonstrate greater willingness to cooperate in its preparation. For instance, despite the differences between Russia and the United States, they can agree to establish a relevant mechanism, regional seminars, or several working groups to launch the parallel process on disarmament and peace in the Middle East. The new process can build on the experience of the ACRS talks, but the major focus should be equally given to WMD and security issues.

2. The Middle Eastern states should view the concept of a zone as a serious disarmament proposal. They should not wait for reciprocity. Instead, they should demonstrate their strong interest in a zone through no-first use declarations with regard to both WMD and missiles, ratification of the CTBT, the BWC or the CWC, as well as support for the Additional Protocol to the Safeguards Agreements. It is clear that the regional states will remain the major players in efforts to overcome the stalemate. Hence, it is advisable to become compromise-oriented, more flexible and exercise a higher level of patient, medium- and long-term thinking.⁶⁵
3. Unless either Israel or the United States participate in the subsequent conferences on the MEWMDFZ, it is not worth drafting a MEWMDFZ treaty.
4. To reach a consensus language on the MEWMDFZ at the 10th RevCon, it is recommended that the Conference President ask Egypt and the United States to start discussions on the Middle East from the first day of the Conference. Neither Egypt nor the United States are likely to endorse this suggestion, but the 2015 NPT RevCon showed that this subject, when addressed in a hurry, can kill the consensus.⁶⁶

These ideas do not present an exhaustive list, but rather a collection of measures that could contribute to progress on a MEWMDFZ.

Revisiting the factors that contributed to the U.S.-Russia dialogue on the MEWMDFZ in 1995 and 2010, one should say that

⁶⁵ Kubbig, Bernd W.; Weidlich, Christian (2015) A WMD/DVs Free Zone For The Middle East. Taking Stock, Moving Forward Towards Cooperative Security, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Academic Peace Orchestra Middle East, Frankfurt, <http://academicpeaceorchestra.com/gui/user/downloads/A%20WMD-DVs%20Free%20Zone%20For%20The%20Middle%20East.pdf> (20 May, 2021).

⁶⁶ Conversation by author with Thomas Countryman on March 22, 2019.

there is only one left, which is a strong interest in the international nonproliferation regime. The political-military relationship is at its lowest level. One cannot currently commend the robust professional relationships, as the majority of bilateral consultations were halted. Nevertheless, the history of the U.S.-Russia interaction shows that the countries can shelve their disagreements in the interest to strengthen the NPT. It remains to be seen what results will be achieved and at the next NPT RevCon.

It should be noted that the UN-facilitated conference on the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East held in November 2019 in New York did not introduce greater clarity into the issue. On the one hand, the November 2019 Conference turned out to be more successful than anyone could expect in the beginning. The conference marked the beginning of a practical implementation of the 1995 Resolution, and it got broad participation of regional states and four nuclear weapon powers. Besides, the negotiations revealed the complementarity of the two forums, namely NPT Review Conferences and UN machinery, for WMDFZ discussions. On the other hand, the U.S. and Israel did not participate, and there is little reason to believe that Israel and the U.S. will change their attitudes to the process that kicked off in the framework of the UN. Additionally, the two states are known to put in considerable effort to dissuade some countries from taking part in the Conference, thus undermining this international enterprise. Moreover, the disagreements between the main groups of players (the League of Arab States on the one hand, and Israel together with the United States on the other) remain unresolved. Despite the unfavorable international situation and skepticism, and even direct opposition from Washington, Russia stood its ground concerning a Middle East WMDFZ. Such a consistent and determined approach has been viewed as positive by Russia's regional partners. Even the regional states that treat Russia with caution (as the monarchies of the Persian Gulf do) cannot ignore the fact that Russia's position on a WMDFZ is clear, logical, and consistent. A political declaration issued at the Conference sends a clear signal to the international community that participants are determined to continue to work together.

Conclusions

Looking back at the MEWMDFZ cooperation between Washington and Moscow offers important lessons about the factors that contributed to successful cooperation.

Such factors as stable political-military relationship, institutional support for nonproliferation, a shared strategic interest in sustaining and strengthening the NPT, and robust professional relationships have always contributed to the successful Conferences. However, today the U.S.-Russian political-military relationship is at its lowest level. One cannot currently commend the robust professional relationships, as the majority of bilateral consultations were halted. Besides, Russia and the United States are obviously split on four issues regarding the zone: the Conference, the role of the co-sponsors in the establishment of a zone, differences regarding the Conference's agenda, and the platform where the MEWMDFZ should be addressed.

Jayantha Dhanapala said that the road ahead for the NPT 'will be influenced greatly by the road behind'. Yet the road behind was different. Some conferences saw active diplomacy working toward a positive conclusion (1995 and 2010) while others were polarized from the beginning, with little or no bridge-building efforts (2005 and 2015). In this regard, the revitalization of high-level bilateral consultations and related direct engagement on NPT issues may again be the first step toward a process of re-engagement on the fuller set of strategic issues now dividing the two countries. That outcome would serve both countries' continuing interests. On the contrary, the exacerbation of divergences is not in the interest of any party and would result in gradually discrediting the NPT as a reliable international legal norm.⁶⁷ The second step would be to make the establishment of a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East a higher priority on their foreign policy agendas and to demonstrate greater willingness to cooperate in its preparation. For instance, despite the differences between Russia and the United States, they can agree to establish a relevant mechanism, regional seminars, or several working groups to launch the parallel process on disarmament and peace in the Middle East. Yet one should understand that today there are more pressing issues that divide the two states.

⁶⁷ Duarte, Sérgio (2018) 'Unmet Promise: The Challenges Awaiting the 2020 NPT Review Conference,' Arms Control Association, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-11/features/unmet-promise-challenges-awaiting-2020-npt-review-conference> (20 May, 2021).

WMDFZ IN THE MIDDLE EAST: CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

January 22, 1958 – The Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS) made the following official statement: “The Middle East should and can become a zone of peace, where there are no nuclear and missile weapons, a zone of good neighborhood and friendly cooperation between states.” The proposal was in response to ongoing discussions by the countries of the Baghdad Pact about hosting U.S. nuclear and missile bases in the region.



1961 – Washington began deploying its PGM-19 Jupiter medium-range nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles in Turkey.

September 4, 1974 – The League of Arab States adopted Resolution No. 3178 On “Creating A Zone Free Of Nuclear Weapons In The Middle East”, endorsing the proposals by the Egyptian foreign minister and the memorandum by the Syrian Arab Republic on the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East and requesting to raise the issue the 29th session of the UNGA.

1974 – The official discussion of the MENWFZ began at the UN General Assembly per the initiative of Iran. The UN General Assembly adopted the resolution “Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East region”.

December 9, 1974 – UN General Assembly released Resolution 3263 On The “Establishment Of A Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone In The Region Of The Middle East”. The resolution considered it was “indispensable that all parties concerned in the area proclaim solemnly and immediately their intention to refrain, on a reciprocal basis, from producing, testing, obtaining, acquiring or in any other way possessing nuclear weapons”, and called on the regional states to accede to the NPT.

1. Commends the idea of the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East;

1975 – The UN Secretary General issued a report on the views of the regional parties on implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution 3263. For the first time a geographical delineation of the region was made since the Secretary General invited the governments of Bahrain, Democratic Yemen, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen to voice their stances on the issue.

1975–1978 – The UN General Assembly adopted a series of resolutions “On The “Establishment Of A Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone In The Region Of The Middle East” that urged all states to take steps towards the establishment of the zone, accede to the NPT, and place any nuclear activities under IAEA safeguards.

1978 – Tenth UN General Assembly Special Session Final Document called on all the states of the region, pending successful negotiations establishing a NWFZ, to declare that they would not acquire, produce or possess nuclear weapons and place all their nuclear activities under IAEA safeguards. It added that consideration should be given to a UN Security Council role in advancing the idea of NWFZ in the Middle East.

1980 – Revised Resolution 35/147 On The “Establishment Of A Nuclear Weapon Free Zone In The Region Of The Middle East” was adopted without a vote for the first time in history. The resolution called upon all the Middle Eastern states to adhere to the NPT, place all their nuclear activities under IAEA safeguards, and declare that they will not to produce, test, acquire, or station nuclear weapons on their territory until a the NWFZ in the Middle East is established.

April 20, 1981 – In a letter to the UN Secretary General, Egypt requested the UN Secretary General to undertake a study to explore the modalities for establishing a NWFZ in the Middle East, indicating that “a study on the establishment of the nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East would undoubtedly facilitate the establishment of the zone, in so far as it may help to focus the attention of the concerned parties on the modalities required to establish the nuclear-weapon-free zone”.

1985 – At the NPT Review Conference, the delegation of the Soviet Union stated that “the time has come to move on to the practical

implementation of the initiative to create a NWFZ.” The Final Documents of the 1985 RevCon welcomed “the consensus reached by the United Nations General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East would greatly enhance international peace and security”, and urged “all parties directly concerned to consider seriously taking the practical and urgent steps required for the implementation of the proposal to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East”.

1986 – Draft Resolution “Israeli Nuclear Threat” co-sponsored by Algeria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Madagascar, Morocco, Namibia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Libya was first introduced for consideration at the 1986 IAEA General Conference. Although the resolution was rejected, the draft called on Israel to put all nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards, and called on the IAEA to monitor Israeli nuclear activities. It also urged other states to refrain from collaborating on nuclear technology with Israel.

September 25, 1987 – IAEA General Conference adopted a resolution “Israeli Nuclear Capabilities And Threat” that called for Israel to place all nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. The resolution also requested that the IAEA Director General report on Israeli nuclear capabilities. This 1987 resolution makes a direct reference to the “information regarding the possession of nuclear weapons by Israel”.

1988 – Resolution On “Israeli Nuclear Capabilities and Threat” was adopted at the IAEA GC. Among other things, the resolution requested that the IAEA Director General prepare a technical study on different modalities of application of IAEA safeguards in the Middle East.

1989 – IAEA “Technical Study On Different Modalities Of Application Of Safeguards In The Middle East”. The study concluded that “there was no common pattern of safeguards application on which to base any future regional agreement”. IAEA recommended the following:

- Conclusion of Safeguards Agreement by those Parties to the NPT which have not done so
- Adherence to the NPT and conclusion of the relevant Safeguards Agreement

- Conclusion of voluntary full-scope agreements
- Application of INFCIRC/66/Rev. 2-type agreements to all nuclear installations
- All States in the region to make similar or identical legally binding unilateral declarations.

1990 – The initiative put forward by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak expanded the concept of MENWFZ to include all WMD. The initiative called on all states of the region to make equal and reciprocal commitments, and verification measures and modalities should be established to ascertain complete compliance by the states in the region.

President Hosni Mubarak, on 8 April 1990, categorically declared Egypt's support for ensuring that the Middle East become a zone free from all types of weapons of mass destruction. President Mubarak emphasized the following:

(1) All weapons of mass destruction, without exception, should be prohibited in the Middle East, i.e. nuclear, chemical, biological, etc.

(2) All States of the region, without exception, should make equal and reciprocal commitments in this regard.

(3) Verification measures and modalities should be established to ascertain full compliance by all States of the region with the full scope of the prohibitions without exception.

April 3, 1991 – UN Security Council adopted Resolution 687, which terminated the Persian Gulf War in 1991, called for an NWFZ and a zone free of all WMD and noted that Iraq's disarmament "represent steps towards the goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for their delivery".

May 29, 1991 – President George H.W. Bush announced a series of proposals intended to curb the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons in the Middle East, as well as the missiles that can deliver them and expressed support for a NWFZ in the region.

August 5, 1991 – In a letter to the UN Secretary General, Egypt suggested new measures such as requiring regional states to declare their support for a Middle East WMDFFZ and called on all the Middle Eastern states to implement IAEA safeguards at all their nuclear

facilities and to submit declarations conveying their intent not to use, produce or test WMD.

1992 – Decision On “Israeli Nuclear Capabilities And Threat” was taken at the 1992 IAEA General Conference to remove the “Israeli nuclear capabilities and threat” item from the agenda. The president of the conference reported that from their consultations with various groups, and in light of the ongoing peace process in the Middle East, including discussions on the establishment of a WMD-free zone, the item would no longer be considered.

July 14, 1993 – A personal paper by Shaleveth Freier, former Director General of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, outlined the Israeli perspective on the future of a Middle East WMD-free zone. Written in 1993, the paper highlights the different viewpoints of Israel and the Arab states on the ongoing peace talks, as well as discussions on regional stability and security.

October 25, 1993 – UN Secretary General presented the Report On The “Establishment Of NWFZ In The Middle East”. In his report, the UN Secretary General concluded that the prospects for establishing a ME NWFZ were more promising at that time and that the process should run in parallel with the “broader aspects of peace settlement” in the Middle East.

March 27, 1994 – Resolution 5380 of League of Arab States On “Coordination Of Arab Positions On Weapons Of Mass Destruction And Mobilizing Efforts Towards The Creating On A Zone Free Of Weapons Of Mass Destruction In The Middle East” established a high-level committee that included international law and military affairs experts to draft a treaty establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East, as well as formulate recommendations on the indefinite extension of the NPT. The draft treaty was not finalized or made public. The effort was paralleled by the activities within the Arms Control and Regional Security Group stemming from the 1991 Madrid Conference.

May 11, 1995 – The adoption of a resolution on the establishment of a WMD free-zone in the Middle East. As part of the package of decisions adopted by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference,

the three NPT depository states sponsor a resolution calling upon all Middle Eastern states to take “practical steps” towards achieving a ME WMDFZ.

5. Calls upon all States in the Middle East to take practical steps in appropriate forums aimed at making progress towards, inter alia, the establishment of an effectively verifiable Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical and biological, and their delivery systems, and to refrain from taking any measures that preclude the achievement of this objective;

November 27–28, 1995 – The Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (aka the Barcelona Process), which include several states from the Middle East adopted a statement calling on ME states to pursue a mutually and effectively verifiable ME WMDFZ, to adhere to international and regional non-proliferation regimes and consider practical steps to prevent WMD proliferation and the accumulation of conventional arms.

September 4, 1997 – Director-general of the Israeli foreign ministry Eytan Bentsur outlined Israel’s perspective on regional security at the Conference on Disarmament. Mr. Bentsur stressed that improved relations among the states of the region was necessary in order to advance discussions on arms control and regional security arrangements.

September 3, 1998 – Final Document of The 12th NAM Summit reiterated the support for the establishment of a Middle East WMD Free Zone, and called on all states to take urgent and practical steps in support of the zone.

May 6, 1999 – The UNDC Report recommended a set of principles and guidelines for NWFZ, which included, *inter alia*, that their establishment should be on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at, emanating exclusively from states within the region concerned, and that a NWFZ should not prevent the use of nuclear science and technology for peaceful purposes.

2000 – The UAE, Djibouti and Oman joined the NPT, which meant that of all the Middle Eastern States, only Israel remained outside the legal framework of the Treaty.

2000 – The 2000 NPT Review Conference Final Document reiterated the validity of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East and invited all States, “especially States of the Middle East, to reaffirm or declare their support for the objective of establishing an effectively verifiable Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons as well as other weapons of mass destruction, to transmit their declarations of support to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to take practical steps towards that objective.”

February 25, 2003 – Final Document Of The 13th NAM Summit, – in paragraph 81, the NAM heads of government reiterate their support for the establishment of a Middle East WMD Free Zone, and called on all states to take urgent and practical steps in support of the zone.

May 13, 2003 – The Chairman`s of NPT Preparatory Committee Factual Summary called on all states in the Middle East to accede to the NPT and place their nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. It took note of the initiative by the U.S., UN, EU and Russia to promote a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which could be an important step in the direction of the establishment of a ME WMDFZ.

7. The Conference welcomes the accessions of Andorra, Angola, Brazil, Chile, Comoros, Djibouti, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Vanuatu to the Treaty since 1995, bringing the number of States parties to 187, and reaffirms the urgency and importance of achieving the universality of the Treaty.

2005 – The NPT RevCon ended without the adoption of the final document over the issue of MEWMDFZ.

December 19, 2005 – Gulf Cooperation Council Secretary-General Al-Attayah announced his initiative to establish a Gulf WMDFZ. The proposed initiative would involve the six GCC states and Iran. In his remarks, Al-Attayah mentioned security concerns regarding the Iranian reactor in Bushehr.

December 29, 2005 – Secretary General of the League of Arab States expressed objection to the GCC Gulf WMDFZ initiative explaining that it could hurt Arab efforts in pursuing a ME WMDFZ.

March 29, 2006 – The LAS Council summit, held in Khartoum, Sudan, 28–29 Mar 2006, lamented the failure of the 2005 NPT RevCon and emphasizing the need to make “the region of the Middle East into a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, above all nuclear weapons”.

2006 – Statement issued by at the LAS Council summit on the failure of the 2005 NPT RevCon emphasized the need to establish a MEWMDFZ. The document also requested the LAS-SG to remain seized in the matter and to provide a report on the security situation in the Arab world in light of the international and regional changes at the next LAS Council Summit

April 30, 2008 – In its working paper, the Arab Group called for the creation of a subsidiary body at the 2010 RevCon to address the implementation of 1995 Resolution on the Middle East and for the UN to convene an international meeting on the establishment of a MEWMDFZ.

July 13, 2008 – the parties at the Paris summit for the Mediterranean decided to pursue a mutually and effectively verifiable Middle East Zone free of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical and biological, and their delivery systems. The summit was intended to revive the Barcelona Process that had begun in 1995.

2009 – At the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 RevCon, the Russian delegation made proposals designed to unblock the impasse over the MENWFZ. Inter alia, Russia proposed to hold a conference to consider the project of the ME WMDFZ and welcomed the idea of appointing a special coordinator to hold consultations on the ME WMDFZ urging the regional states to taking certain confidence-building measures.

May 28 2010 – The Final Document of the NPT RevCon called for a 2012 conference of all Middle Eastern states to move forward on a 1995 proposal for a nuclear-free Mideast and for the United Nations secretary general, along with the United States, Russia and Britain, to appoint a facilitator and consult with the countries of the Middle East convening the conference.

November 21–22, 2011 – The IAEA organized a two-day forum to learn from the “Experience of Possible Relevance to the Creation of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East”. The forum looked at different regional contexts and approaches to successfully establish NWFZs.

March 29, 2012 – In resolution 557, the LAS Council welcomed the steps taken in preparation for the 2012 ME WMDFZ conference, the efforts by the facilitator to consult with the states and warned that if the conference were to fail the Arab states would have to take other measures to ensure their security. The resolution described the 2012 ME WMDFZ conference as a crossroads.

August 28, 2012 – The Russian draft resolution was submitted at the 56th IAEA GC, included language that acknowledged and strongly supported the planned 2012 Helsinki conference and aimed to use the GC “as a forum to give a positive impetus” to the preparations and work of that conference by asking all the Middle Eastern member states to commit to attending it. Due to lack of support, Russia withdrew the draft resolution.

October 4, 2012 – The PIR Center held an international seminar, during which Iran for the first time confirmed its readiness to participate in the conference in Helsinki. Israel, although it did not make such a statement, held consultations with a representative of the Arab League on the sidelines of the seminar.

November 2012 – The conference with the participation of all the Middle Eastern States on the establishment of the NWFZ was postponed. The reason for the postponement of the Conference was the disagreement of the parties. On the one hand, Washington gradually began to withdraw its support for the specific provisions of the 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences, which called on Israel to join the NPT and place national nuclear facilities under the comprehensive control of the IAEA. On the other hand, the positions of Israel and the Arab States on the inclusion of issues of regional security and peace did not coincide. While this was a key condition for Israel to participate in the planned event, the Arab States and Iran believed that the issues of achieving peace in the region and the issues of creating a NWFZ should be considered separately from each other.

August 2013 –Russia made Syria join the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and destroyed its respective stockpiles.

September 3, 2013 – Israel reiterated its willingness to participate in the informal consultation process and emphasizing that the consultations should be based in consensus and highlighted the potential of such consultations to start the region on a path of direct dialogue leading to a shared vision of a more secure Middle East.

September 28, 2013 – In his speech to the UN General Assembly, Minister Nabil Fahmy urged all countries in the Middle East, as well as the five permanent members of the Security Council to formally state their support for a MEWMDFZ; for all the states of the region to accede to the WMD international conventions and to work towards holding the postponed 2012 ME WMDFZ conference by the Spring of 2014.

November 4, 2013 – the Facilitator extended an invitation to the League of Arab States to participate in the second round of consultations regarding convening a conference.

November 10, 2013 – In its Resolution 7718, the LAS decided to support the Egyptian initiative to promote efforts to free the Middle East region of all weapons of mass destruction, presented by FM Fahmy at UN General Assembly.

2013–2014 – In Switzerland (in Geneva and in Glion), five rounds of negotiations were held with the participation of most of the countries of the Middle East region. Even though Russia was ready to support the Israeli idea to link MEWMDFZ and regional security issues, the Arab countries saw this as threatening to “dilute” the mandate of the conference. As a result, the negotiations stalled.



2014 – rollback of the entire process of interaction between Russia and the United States.

April 28 – May 4, 2014 – At the 2014 NPT PrepCom, the members of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI), submitted joint working paper outlining the NPDI's perspective on the creation of a Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the steps to be taken in support of implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East.

2015 – The 2015 NPT RevCon ended without a consensus document, with Canada, UK and U.S. rejecting the language on the MEWMDZFZ in the draft final document. In its concluding remarks, the U.S. explained that it was "not able to support the draft consensus document and the language related to the convening of the ME WMDZFZ Conference was "incompatible with our long-standing policies." The statement added that "the initiative for the creation of such zones should emanate from the regions themselves, and under a process freely arrived at and with the full mutual consent of all the states in the region." The U.S. lamented Egypt and the Arab states were "not willing to let go of these unrealistic and unworkable conditions included in the draft text."

December 5, 2016 – Resolution 71\29 adopted by the General Assembly urged all states to take steps towards the establishment of the zone, and called on all regional states to adhere to the NPT and place any nuclear activities under IAEA safeguards.

2017 – First session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference. Russia presented a working paper outlining three principles for organizing the work on convening the Conference envisaging that: 1) decisions on substantive issues should be taken by consensus; 2) the participation of all States of the region without exception is desirable; 3) one meeting of the Conference was recommended to be devoted to discussing several specific aspects of regional security, which should be agreed in advance by the States of the region and fit into the context of the 1995 resolution.

2018 – In its working paper, Washington called the NPT review process "ill-suited" to address the issue of establishing a MEWFZ.

May 8, 2018 – the U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA.

September 21, 2018 – IAEA General Conference adopted a resolution calling on all States in the region to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); cooperate fully with the IAEA within the framework of their respective obligations; and affirming the urgent need for all States in the Middle East to forthwith accept the application of full-scope Agency safeguards to all their nuclear activities as an important confidence-building measure among all States in the region and as a step in enhancing peace and security in the context of the establishment of an NWFZ.

November 1–9, 2018 – The resolution on the establishment of the zone, which had been adopted annually by consensus in the First Committee and UNGA, is put to a vote by Israel for the first time since 1980. The resolution was adopted by 171 votes for, and two against (Israel and the U.S.), with 5 abstentions. In its explanation of vote, Israel linked its change in vote to the Arab Group “imposing a new unilateral and destructive resolution [sic] entitled “Convening a Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction”.

- (d) **The NPT review cycle cannot be the primary mechanism for progress on a Middle East WMD-free zone.** NPT Preparatory Committee meetings and Review Conferences are opportunities for assessing progress on the Treaty and strengthening implementation of the Treaty across areas of common interest, not for resolving regional disputes. The security undertakings and benefits of the Treaty are bigger than any one region, and progress in advancing the shared interests of all parties should not be held captive to parochial regional objectives. Moreover, the review cycle is particularly ill suited to resolving such issues in the Middle East, as not all regional states are a Party to the NPT or bound by decisions made in the NPT context. Continued efforts by some NPT Parties to impose a solution on the region will further erode trust among regional states and set back the goals of the 1995 Resolution.

December 22, 2018 – The UN General Assembly has decided to convene a Conference on the MEWMDFZ. The goal is to launch the negotiation process for the development of a legally binding agreement on the WMD free-zone.

2019 – During the 2019 PrepCom, it became known that the UN Conference on the Establishment of a MEWFZ will be held in New York from November 18 to 22, 2019.

November 18–22, 2019 – The United Nations Conference on the WMD free-zone in New York. The participating countries adopted a political declaration, declaring a commitment to continue openly and inclusively developing a treaty on the establishment of a WMD free-zone on the basis of agreements voluntarily concluded by the States of the region. Nevertheless, the contradictions between the main groups of players (the Arab League, on the one hand, and Israel and the United States, on the other) remain unresolved.

December 12, 2019 – Resolution 74\30 adopted by the General Assembly about Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East.

It was emphasized 'the basic provisions of the above-mentioned resolutions, in which all parties directly concerned are called upon to consider taking the practical and urgent steps required for the implementation of the proposal to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East and, pending and during the establishment of such a zone, to declare solemnly that they will refrain, on a reciprocal basis, from producing, acquiring or in any other way possessing nuclear weapons and nuclear explosive devices and from permitting the stationing of nuclear weapons on their territory by any third party, to agree to place their nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards and to declare their support for the establishment of the zone and to deposit such declarations with the Security Council for consideration, as appropriate'.

July 7–9, 2020 – Informal seminar organized by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. The workshop was organized in consultation with the President and participating States 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. The initiative was an effort to support the implementation of the outcome of the first session of the Conference, which agreed to invite representatives of existing nuclear-weapon-free zones, as well as relevant experts, to share good practices and lessons learned in the establishment of such zones.

September 21, 2020 – the conference decided to postpone its second session, originally planned for 16–20 November 2020, to be held at a later date, but no later than November 2021.

Compiled by Anna Lashina