

“Advancing a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone in the Middle East”

Analyses and recommendations from an expert conference, organized and sponsored by the Palestine-Israel Journal (PIJ) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), April 9, 2014, New York

**Compiled and Edited by
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Introduction

While the **International Conference on a Nuclear- and Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone**, mandated by the decision of the NPT Review Conference in May 2010, has not yet been convened, the **Palestine-Israel Journal** (www.pij.org) published a special issue in the fall of 2013 devoted to **A Middle East Without Weapons of Mass Destruction**, with the support of the **Friedrich Ebert Stiftung** (FES) Jerusalem, followed by a public conference, attended by distinguished local and international experts. This issue was the product of the editors’ engagement in a series of local and regional civil society activities, sometimes with government representatives, to provide civil society input into the discussion on non-proliferation. After the publication of the issue, the PIJ decided, together with the representatives of the FES in New York and Washington, DC, that it was vitally important to bring this discussion to the United States, particularly to the policy community in New York around the United Nations and to the U.S. government in Washington. While the U.S. is one of the co-sponsors of what is now known as the Helsinki Process, together with the United Kingdom, Russia and the UN secretary-general, and has a critical role to play in advancing the process, the issue is not on the public and political agenda in Washington, despite President Barack Obama’s commitment in Prague in 2009 to the vision of a nuclear weapons-free world. The purpose of the activities in NY and DC was to help place the issue on the agenda and to bring a strong message to the opinion and decision-makers there from the Middle East.

The fact that the five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany (P5+1) are currently negotiating with the new regime in Iran, led by President Hassan Rouhani, for a possible solution to the tensions around the Iranian nuclear program and that a diplomatic agreement between the U.S. and Russia was reached to remove the Syrian chemical weapons created a positive backdrop for these activities, which

were held on the eve of the third and last session of the NPT Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meeting before the next NPT Review Conference, which will be held in 2015. However, tensions between Russia and the West and difficulties in the American-facilitated Israeli-Palestinian negotiations were less propitious.

An all-day conference was held in New York on April 9, 2014 devoted to **Advancing a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone in the Middle East**, with the participation of four representatives from the Middle East: **Sameh Aboul-Enein**, professor of international security and disarmament at American University in Cairo, Egypt; **Shlomo Brom**, Brig. Gen. (Ret.), senior research associate at the Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University, Israel; **Ziad AbuZayyad**, former head of the Palestinian delegation to the arms control and national security (ACRS) multilateral talks and co-editor of the PIJ, Palestine; and **Hillel Schenker**, co-editor of the PIJ, Israel. The other presenters were **Thomas Countryman**, assistant secretary, Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, U.S. State Department; **Trita Parsi**, president of the National Iranian-American Council, **H.E. Libran N. Cabactulan**, permanent representative of the Philippines to the UN and chair of the 2010 NPT Review Conference; and **Kelsey Davenport**, nonproliferation analyst of the Arms Control Association. **Jarmo Viinanen**, permanent representative of Finland to the UN, representing the facilitator and host country for the international conference, served as chair, and **Michael Wahid Hanna**, senior fellow at the Century Foundation, was the moderator. Fifty-two diplomats, think-tank experts, civil society activists and government representatives participated in the conference. FES NY Executive Director **Michele Auga** and senior policy analyst **Volker Lehmann** were responsible for the organization of the conference.

The four representatives from the Middle East also participated in a Dialogue Program in Washington on April 10, **Advancing a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East**, which included meetings at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with relevant Congressional representatives; meetings with State Department officials who are responsible for arms control, international security and proliferation issues; a public event in cooperation with the Arms Control Association on **The Iranian Nuclear Talks and Regional Arms Control**; and a meeting the experts at the Middle East Institute. Joining them at these meetings were **Pia Bungarten**, FES director for the U.S., Canada and DC; **Michele Auga**, FES NY Executive Director; and **Volker Lehmann**, senior policy analyst.

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Executive Summary

- The resolution at the 2010 NPT Review Conference to convene an international conference on a Nuclear- and Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone in the Middle East creates both a framework and a window of opportunity — one that we should take advantage of by convening the international conference in Helsinki during the coming year.
- The League of Arab States has declared that if the international conference is not convened before the 2015 NPT Review Conference, their commitment to the entire non-proliferation regime might be reevaluated, regardless of the state of the Israeli-Palestinian situation.
- The U.S., together with the UK, Russia and the UN secretary-general are responsible for overseeing the convening of the international conference. Given the influence of the U.S., it is important and necessary to engage the U.S. government and raise awareness within American society about the NPT, the decision to convene an international conference, and the potential repercussions if the conference is not convened before 2015. Governments and civil society should work together to lay the groundwork for the conference and the participation of all relevant parties.
- It is understood that progress toward an agreement between the P5+1 and the Iranian government regarding the Iranian nuclear program, alongside the Russian-U.S. agreement to remove chemical weapons from Syria, could make an important contribution to an environment conducive to convening the international conference, as would progress toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which would contribute to regional stability and mutual trust.
- A more constructive approach to engaging all the countries of the region, including Iran and Israel, is needed. Both countries have to feel that they are part of a process and are helping to shape the agenda. When necessary, the international community should also emphasize the price to be paid if progress is not made.
- It would be constructive to have parallel tracks, one which starts a serious discussion about the steps needed to create a nuclear- and weapons of mass destruction-free zone in the region, and another which works on progress toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the creation of a new regional regime of peace and security.

- Mutual confidence-building measures (CBMs) can help move the process forward. These can include discussions on conventional and non-conventional weapons and regional second track activities conducive to the creation of an organization in charge of regional cooperation and security.
- We are witnessing the growing importance of public opinion, both in the Arab World in the wake of the Arab Spring, and in Israel following the 2011 mass social protest movement. Yet the need for a nuclear- and WMD-free zone in the Middle East is not an issue of public concern in the streets of Arab countries or in Israel. We need to encourage and promote public debate on nuclear weapons and WMD, involving people outside of the specialists and policy-makers.
- Bringing technical/scientific experts from all the countries in the region together for information-sharing can help build cooperation in verification and monitoring. Joint training programs could be organized and a center for joint development of verification technologies. Many other concrete proposals can and should be raised.

Recommendations

1. There is an increasing need for regional cooperation in the Middle East. One of the things most lacking is regular and consistent dialogue between states on regional issues. One of the main obstacles to this dialogue is the failure in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The resolution of this protracted conflict would allow for easier dialogue between different states in the region and a much stronger foundation for dealing with new challenges.

2. The resolution at the 2010 NPT Review Conference to convene an international conference on a nuclear- and WMD-free zone in the Middle East creates both a framework and a window of opportunity. This window of opportunity should be taken advantage of by the convening of the international conference at Helsinki during the coming year.

3. To advance the process, it would be constructive to have parallel tracks, one which starts a serious discussion about the steps needed to create a nuclear- and WMD free zone in the region, and another which works on progress toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the creation of a new regime of peace and security in the region.

4. Due to the influence the U.S. has, it is important and necessary to engage with the U.S. government and raise awareness within American society about the facts connected to the NPT, the decision to convene an international conference in Helsinki, and the need to make progress toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

5. The U.S. needs help in advancing the process, and it would be good to develop a common approach about the Helsinki conference and about nuclear non-proliferation in general together with the UK, Russia, the UN, etc. Such a partnership should be created and strengthened to present a united front on the issue — with Russia and China in particular — not just to persuade other countries, but also to build trust toward mutual disarmament. Secretary of State John Kerry and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov have said that they would try to keep the “uncertainties” around Ukraine from spilling over to neighboring regions. U.S.-Russia cooperation on continued negotiations with Iran, the disarmament of Syria and common initiatives in the region may help prevent such a spillover.

6. If sanctions helped bring Iran to the negotiating table, perhaps it can work with Israel as well, in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the issue of the WMD-free zone. The international community can come together and exert pressure on countries that do not comply with NPT concerns, as demonstrated with Iran.

7. While the new Iranian government is not using the same inflammatory language the previous government used toward Israel, it would help if the Iranians were to try to reach out to Israeli civil society, beyond symbolic greetings for the Jewish New Year and calling the country “Israel” rather than “the Zionist entity.”

8. Mutual confidence-building measures (CBMs) can help to move the process forward. These can include discussions on conventional and non-conventional weapons and the creation of an organization that would be in charge of regional cooperation and security, as was done in Europe with the European Helsinki process and the establishment of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which led to the creation of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). While there have been some attempts in the past, including the civil society Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Middle East (CSCME) initiative, these efforts need to be significantly increased and developed.

9. We need a more constructive approach to engaging all the countries of the region, including Iran and Israel. Both countries have to feel that they are part of a process and are helping to shape the agenda. It is to be hoped that there will be an equal willingness on the part of both Israel and Iran to engage in this process.

10. Progress on the P5+1 talks with Iran can contribute greatly to the creation of a positive environment for the convening of the Helsinki conference. The U.S. should strengthen financial guarantees to banks so that they will not be afraid to release the money previously held under rules of economic sanctions. If this issue is not resolved, it could constitute a major setback for the negotiations.

11. The international conference on a nuclear- and WMD-free zone in the Middle East should be inclusive. Among the goals to be discussed are: nuclear disarmament,

dismantlement and rollback. The discussion should also focus on delivery systems and on the scientific and technical dimensions which have so far been ignored. All of the relevant international organizations (CTBT, NPT, ODA, OPCW, BWC, IAEA, etc.) should be involved in the process. Technical/scientific experts from all countries in the region should be brought together, for information-sharing can serve as a building block towards cooperation in verification and monitoring. One step would be to establish a common lexicon so that people in the region have a common language in which to discuss all these issues. Joint training programs could be organized, possibly through the EU CBRN center in Jordan. Another goal should be to establish a center for joint development of verification technologies. And there is a need to find a way to generate political will to spur the above actions.

12. The parameters of a Middle East nuclear and WMD-free zone can be based on and benefit from the treaties that have already been negotiated, such as the Treaty of Tlatelolco, the Treaty of Pelindaba, the Treaty of Rarotonga and the Bangkok Treaty, as they will be helpful in figuring out the technical and institutional measures necessary.

13. There is a need to reinforce both the PrepCom and the general review cycle of the NPT. Decisions should be made as to what the implications of noncompliance are, what security guarantees can be given to countries, etc

14. There is a need to work to advance general understanding about the importance of the NPT and to evaluate, without bias, how it is being implemented. The 2015 NPT Review Conference is important in informing and affirming progress and the need to indicate that current efforts are insufficient. At the conference, it is important to propose and arrive at 1) concrete action related to nuclear disarmament, 2) concrete action related to nonproliferation, and 3) a clear path forward following the 1995 resolution on a nuclear- and WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

15. We are witnessing the growing importance of public opinion, both in Arab World in the wake of the Arab Spring, and in Israel following the 2011 mass social protest movement. Yet the need for a nuclear- and WMD-free zone in the Middle East is not an issue of public concern in the streets of Arab countries or in Israel. **We need to reach people outside of the specialists and policy-makers.** People do not necessarily understand the issue, so it is important to help them understand, and we should be more proactive in raising awareness around the importance of the issue. There is a need to take this global idea and break it down, to promote face-to-face contact and trust-building. We should not focus only on seminars among experts; it needs to be bigger than that and reach more people. And to achieve this goal, it will be very important to give more attention to training and educating specialized journalists, who can report on the topic to increase public concern about it.

General Framework – The Main Points Raised in the Discussion

1. Recent Developments in the Regional Security of the Middle East

1) The lack of progress in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations has a direct and negative impact on Israel's relationship with other states in the Middle East (Iran, Turkey, etc.) and is often used by other powers for purposes of political manipulation. It also hinders the ability and possibility for dialogue between states in the region.

2) There has been a change in the nature of threats in the region. The Arab Spring has caused a weakening of the state systems in the Middle East, which has led to a rise of internal threats (Sunni-Shiite, intra-Sunni, etc.) and the decrease in importance of external threats caused by other states. States and governments in the region are therefore increasingly concerned with the domestic arena, particularly with the rise of non-state actors, and the bearing they have on regional security. This decreases the threat of nuclear weapons and increases the need for regional cooperation between states.

3) The Arab Spring did not prevent the disarmament of Syria's chemical weapons, which will most likely be concluded successfully. WMDs are perceived by regimes in the Middle East as a useful tool that ensures the survival of the regime. In the case of Syria, it became the biggest threat to the survival of the regime. It is due to this change in perception that Syria was willing to be disarmed.

4) The interim agreement with Iran vis-à-vis its nuclear program was a step in the right direction. It enabled the freezing of the Iranian nuclear program, which allowed for the time and stability necessary for a possible conclusion of a final agreement.

5) The American-Russian diplomatic solution to the Syrian chemical weapons program and the P5+1 negotiations with Iran regarding its nuclear program are very positive developments in the region. This demonstrates that although progress toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts remains problematic for regional security, it does not wholly interfere with a possible regional and international dialogue on a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

6) However, while disarmament must be an integral part of any process from the beginning, it cannot be achieved in isolation from broader regional issues (discussion on conventional capabilities, regional security, Palestine, recognition, normalization, etc.). The Arab Peace Initiative, initially launched in Beirut in 2002, and reaffirmed once again in March 2014 in Kuwait, which declares the readiness of the 22 League of Arab States members and the 57 Muslim states (including the Arab states) for peace and normal relations with

Israel after the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is resolved can be an important tool to move forward.

- 7) The 2010 NPT Review Conference mandated the convening of an international conference to advance a nuclear- and WMD-free zone. If it is not convened before the next NPT Review Conference in 2015, the League of Arab States has declared that their commitment to the entire non-proliferation regime might be reevaluated, regardless of the state of the Israeli-Palestinian situation. The U.S. has a key role in the resolution of both issues, and should be engaged in order to move each issue forward within this timeframe. Initiatives such as this one, organized by the PIJ and FES, are therefore vital in raising awareness among the American public and governmental circles about the importance of the American role as part of civil society involvement in this campaign.
- 8) American suggestions that they “can't want peace more than the parties themselves” will not help to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or serve American, Israeli or Palestinian genuine interests. If the U.S. does not take a more forceful position concerning the outcome of the negotiations, they are unlikely to move forward. Being too attuned to official Israeli positions will not contribute to a resolution of the conflict.
- 9) If the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not resolved in the near future, there is a danger that it will be transformed from a national conflict between Israelis and Palestinians into a religious Jewish-Muslim conflict, which would make it much harder to resolve. The tensions around the Al-Aqsa compound, the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount area, and the attempts of Israeli right wing groups to change the status quo and pray in the mosque courtyards are a flash point of a potentially very dangerous scenario.
- 10) The Arab Spring has largely bypassed Iran so far. From their perspective, the threats to Iran are not necessarily nuclear-based. The Salafist threat from Saudi Arabia and certain internal (ethnic) threats are a lot more problematic for national security, which are further exacerbated by an unstable region, along with environmental threats (which are often forgotten). In fact the threat of Israel, for the Iranians, does not figure particularly high, which explains why they are able to negotiate so freely with the Obama administration and the P5+1.
- 11) According to the Iranians, Iran has held up its end of the bargain with the IAEA (ensuring only 20% uranium enrichment and not adding any new centrifuges, etc.). However, the U.S. has not entirely held up its end — some of the money has still not been released. This is due to the reluctance of some of the banks to release the money due to the astronomical fines they previously faced under the sanctions; the guarantees are not strong enough.

- 12) Israel and Arab world (particularly the Gulf) are worried about what a post-nuclear deal region would look like. Such an agreement could cause a significant shift in regional realignment — old alliances rekindled (Iran-U.S.?), which would change the order that has shaped the region since the fall of the Shah in 1979. This is a fear that remains particularly relevant in Saudi Arabia, which fears a rekindled Iran-U.S. alliance. However, this scenario is profoundly exaggerated and unlikely.
- 13) Talks regarding the Iranian nuclear program are filled with difficulties, but are nevertheless continuing with hopes of reaching an agreement. Among the biggest factors that brought Iran to the negotiating table are the external pressures exerted on it, which caused internal political change and made it costly for Iran to proceed with its nuclear program. This can also be a lesson for international involvement towards resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- 14) The international community should hold the countries in the region, including Israel, accountable according to international law, in connection with its policies regarding the occupation, settlements, etc. Extremist elements within societies in the region need to be marginalized or eliminated.
- 15) The international community may also have a role to play regarding the ambiguity regarding Israel's nuclear program (allowing for verification, inspection, etc.). While the Israeli nuclear program does not have a direct bearing on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Palestinians are also affected by regional developments in the nuclear and non-conventional weapons arenas.

2. A WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East and the NPT

- 1) The Arab Spring has changed existing regional dynamics. There has been a rise in the role of the general public in Arab societies, which will have a more fundamental role to play in the formulation of regional issues, such as disarmament and security issues.
- 2) The success of the proposed international conference on the establishment of the zone will be crucial to the success of the current NPT review cycle and its outcome. It is imperative that there be no further delay in convening it. We can and should also make use of the lessons learned from other regional nuclear- and WMD-free zones (use similar technical items or institutional make up, for instance). If the conference is not convened, there could be serious consequences concerning the future of proliferation within the region, and also on the credibility of the entire NPT regime. Egypt has signaled its readiness to be flexible on setting the terms of the agenda for the conference to ensure that it can be convened.
- 3) One approach suggests that the need to look at what can be done at the technical level (technical development and trust building) to build capacity within the

region, could be more helpful at this stage towards establishing the zone than any political process. The lack of technical capacity, training and legal frameworks and regulations prevents specific countries from being provided with assurances for their security.

- 4) Verification mechanisms for a future nuclear- and WMD-free zone in the Middle East should be developed by the international community.
- 5) The NPT cannot be indefinitely extended every five years without making significant progress toward the overall goal of a nuclear free world. This should include progress toward a nuclear- and WMD-free zone in the Middle East.
- 6) There will be serious repercussions if the international conference is not held. A very pessimistic forecast holds that it may even be used as an excuse to eliminate the NPT, causing the entire international non-proliferation regime to unravel.
- 7) The international community has been and will be instrumental in the Middle East. In the cases of Iran and Syria, the international community used the tools at its disposal to move things forward. However, there has been little movement and implementation when it comes to a WMD-free zone in the region.

3. American Role in Advancing a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East

- 1) President Obama has made some positive progress in his goal of achieving a nuclear weapons-free world. The U.S. and the Russian Federation concluded new START agreements, and cut the levels of their nuclear arsenals. Additionally, there is a greater international consensus that nuclear weapons are not the best foreign policy option (oil embargo on Iran, isolation of North Korea, etc.). However, it is not enough; there is a need to remain aware of the possibility of terrorists gaining access to or constructing crude nuclear devices.
- 2) The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is perhaps the most successful and influential international treaty ever made. It has made the nuclear weapons system manageable by normalizing the anti-nuclear weapons trend in many regions. Yet many problems still have to be overcome. The P5+1 negotiations with Iran are working on resolving one of the primary problems.
- 3) Israel is not a member of the NPT. Therefore, it does not have a legal obligation to attend the international conference on a nuclear- and WMD-free zone in the Middle East. However, it can be persuaded, and the Arab League believes the U.S. has the power to convince Israel to attend. The U.S. does not believe it has the ability to force anyone — especially Israel — to attend if it is not perceived to be in its interest. Successful conferences derive from willing partners. It should be noted that although the idea of the conference emerged from the 2010 NPT Review Conference, it will not be held within the NPT framework, but as a separate international initiative.

- 4) The U.S. has not been forceful enough in encouraging Israel to participate in the international conference, but there is a perception that it might not be productive to do so. The Israelis have to feel that they have a part in setting the agenda for the conference.
- 5) The U.S. supports a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East and always has. It is an important goal to strive for, but there remain significant obstacles to achieving it.
- 6) A nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East is an ambitious project, and it is difficult to apply the model of successful treaties in other areas to this region. In the other areas where treaties were signed, the states all recognize and talk with each other. That is not the case in the Middle East. In the Middle East, the topic is not only seen as a political issue, but as an existential issue.
- 7) The fact that the "Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances," a diplomatic memorandum that was signed in December 1994 by Ukraine, Russia, the U.S. and the UK, has not been fully observed by one of the parties is of deep concern in terms of the international assurances and security, political and legal implications, particularly given the geographic proximity to the Middle East.
- 8) International civil society, in cooperation with various governments, has been convening a series of international conferences devoted to "The Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons," the first held in Oslo, Norway and the second in Nayarit, Mexico. To date, the American government has not participated in this process, since it has reservations about the agenda that has been formulated for these conferences. If the agenda for the next conference in this series—scheduled to take place in Vienna, Austria—is formulated differently, there is a possibility that the U.S. will send representatives to the conference.

“Advancing a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East”

Wednesday, April 9, 2014 8:45 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

List of Participants

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The conference was held under the Chatham House Rules, thus there are no direct quotations, either in the description of the points raised in the discussion or in the recommendations. The drafting of this document is the responsibility of the editors, Hillel Schenker and Ziad AbuZayyad.

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