Arms Control and Missle Proliferation in the Middle East
Edited by Bernd W. Kuebbig and Sven-Eric Finkefscher
Arms Control and Missile Proliferation in the Middle East

This edited volume provides a systematic analysis of the missile threat and proliferation issue in the Middle East region.

The question of how to increase the level of security in the Middle East is not a new one, given the conflict-ridden nature of the region. The solution attempted for this predicament has typically revolved around intense arms build-ups, a strategy which can prove self-defeating due to the subsequent countermeasures employed by neighbouring states.

*Arms Control and Missile Proliferation in the Middle East* focuses on the strategic proliferation of arms, with a specific emphasis on missiles. This unique emphasis enables the contributors to provide a dynamic new perspective on conceptual and political disarmament efforts, thereby distinguishing this volume from many other related works on the region, which deal mainly with weapons of mass destruction. The book also explores the possibility of a reduction in weapon arsenals, examining a more promising cooperative security concept which includes confidence- and security-building measures.

This book will be of much interest to students of arms control, Middle Eastern politics, Gulf security, war and conflict studies, security studies, and IR.

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From (potential) spoilers to guarantors?
The role of external powers

Sven-Eric Fikenscher, Sameh Aboul-Enein, Gülden Ayman, Anton Khlopkov, and Hui Zhang

Extra-regional actors and missile disarmament in the Middle East

In 1987 mounting concerns – mainly of Western states – about ongoing proliferation activities led to the establishment of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). The MTCR has established some supply-side focused rules. It prohibits the export of missiles able to carry a 500 kg payload over 300 km, while largely ignoring the demand-side, i.e. the interests and motivations behind missile projects. The second international agreement dealing with the dangers posed by missiles, the Hague Code of Conduct Against Ballistic Missile Proliferation, has not rectified this shortcoming. Nevertheless, real progress in non-proliferation has been made especially in the years following the establishment of the MTCR. In the MTCR’s first decade, Argentina, Brazil, Iraq, Libya, South Africa, South Korea, Syria, and Taiwan were thwarted from advancing their missile agendas. Since then, however, India, Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan have launched medium-range missiles and several other states have expanded their research activities (Mistry 2003). So obviously outlawing the export of delivery systems can, though in many cases not sufficiently, curb their spread.

In the Middle East/Gulf, a region that has generally remained outside the MTCR, proliferation has largely depended on extra-regional supply. Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Iran mainly imported (Soviet) Scuds (Frolov 2007: 32). North Korea as well as China have also been highly involved in the transfer of missile technology to the Middle East, Pyongyang being the major supplier of Iran and Beijing being one of the major sources for the Saudi programme. The United States provided numerous anti-air and anti-missile capabilities to its allies. With regard to the aims of the present volume, namely to explore the idea of (complete) missile disarmament, this history testifies to the importance of examining the role of proliferators and analysing how they might be convinced to stop their deliveries. But the overall question regarding the role of external powers is an even more complicated one. The regional activities of the
major proliferating countries that are feeding the arms race do not stop at the transfer of weapon systems. The US military presence and its willingness to use force or the threat of force against its regional enemies, thereby creating demand for such weapons, is a case in point. As a result, we analyse all relevant policies of external powers that (might) undermine regional disarmament in the missile sector and ask about the conditions under which they would support missile control and ultimately a Missile Free Zone (MFZ) so as to change their role from (potential) spoilers to that of guarantors of an MFZ. In this regard we follow an all-encompassing missile definition (see the Introduction by Bernd W. Kubbig) and will finally – based on the analysis of the external powers’ positions – examine whether it needs to be narrowed.

First, we describe the boundaries of the zone and evaluate the implications of its membership for the role of extra-regional powers operating military bases in close proximity of zonal states. Then, in order to examine the role of external actors as (potential) spoilers, we consider the lessons which can be learned from the establishment of the Nuclear Weapon Free Zones (NWFZs) in Latin America and the South Pacific. We will use these results to evaluate those policies of extra-regional countries that (might) undermine missile disarmament in the Middle East, before turning to the issue of exports. In the following step we examine the motives behind such policies in order to conclude if and how they can be changed. We will focus on the states which are the most active suppliers of missile technology and have the power and willingness to influence regional arms dynamics, the United States, Russia, and China.

These countries are not only major providers of missile technology, but also key players in the region. Washington has an enormous military presence in the Middle East and remains the major peace broker. Moscow is also involved in various diplomatic initiatives such as the Middle East Quartet and has occasionally played a special role in negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme, while Beijing has stepped up its ‘energy diplomacy’ within the envisaged zone. We will neither consider North Korea, which, although it is an influential supplier, lacks political clout in the Middle East, nor will we do an in-depth analysis of European countries which are no longer major missile exporters.

The scope of the zone: where to draw the line?

Since our research interest is based on a distinction between regional and extra-regional players, the first question is how to define the boundaries of a Missile Free Zone in the Middle East. Unfortunately, similar attempts of the United Nations with regard to the proposed establishment of an NWFZ or a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ) are of little help. Each year since 1974 the General Assembly has duly passed resolutions calling for an NWFZ for “the region of the Middle East” without further specification. The Final Documents which were passed by the 1995 and 2010 Review Conferences on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) both include a section on the conflict region, without addressing the central geographical issue. The two agreements simply support the General Assembly resolutions by calling for a “zone free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems” but remain non-specific about its location, only exhorting all “regional parties of [the] Middle East” to follow their call (Review Conference 2010: 30).

The landmark UN study on the establishment of an NWFZ, worked out by James Leonard, Jan Prawitz, and Benjamin Sanders (1991), passed by the General Assembly in 1990, is the notable exception to other resolutions, since it provides some guidance on a definition of the region. The three authors reject fixed boundaries and instead suggest that only “core countries” whose participation is indispensable for facilitating arms control should be charter members of the accord. With regard to its final form Leonard et al. (ibid.: 20) offer two possibilities. The first, based on a study of the International Atomic Energy Agency, includes “the area extending from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in the West, to the Islamic Republic of Iran in the East, and from Syria in the North to the People’s Republic of Yemen in the South”. The second includes “all State members of the League of Arab States…, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Israel”.

Both proposals are compelling as far as the ultimate boundaries of a zone are concerned. In the foreseeable future, however, they are too far-reaching, because they include actors that cannot be regarded as “core countries” since they are not at the centre of the conflict formations such as the Arab states west of Egypt, where, in addition, important disarmament successes have been reached since 1990. The establishment of an NWFZ on the entire continent in 1996 and the discontinuation of Libya’s WMD programmes in 2003 have undoubtedly been the most important milestones. In addition, the missile related capabilities of the North African states are rather limited. Even the range of Tripoli’s missiles is relatively short – they are only able to reach some parts of the neighbouring countries – and its attempts to acquire the North Korean Nodong with a range of more than 1,000 km have failed (GlobalSecurity.org 2010). Therefore our conception of a (preliminary) MFZ covers the territory from Egypt in the west to Iran in the east and from Syria in the north to Yemen in the south (see Map 1), including those states that have been identified in this volume as being of central importance for regional conflict dynamics (see the articles of Bernd W. Kubbig et al. and of Uri Bar-Joseph).

Nevertheless, this definition raises further questions regarding US involvement in the conflict formations and its military presence in Afghanistan and Turkey. Putting the two countries under zonal restrictions might convince American foes to join an arms control accord, as long as the disarmament obligations apply to Washington’s local military presence as well. However, this could also complicate the process, since Kabul and
Ankara would have to accept the same restrictions as those which apply to the zonal states. This would not be acceptable for Turkey which opposes participating in regional disarmament accords since it does not consider itself to be a part of the Middle East. Instead a promising solution could focus solely on the role of Washington. A separate agreement between the members of the MFZ and the United States in which the US foregoes (the option of) deploying missiles and nuclear weapons in Afghanistan and Turkey – where Washington still stores nuclear arms at Incirlik air base (Kristensen 2010) – would address Iranian fears of being encircled by American troops. The agreed-upon deployment of the missile defence (MD) radar system in Turkey might be affected by such an accord. But Ankara would still be allowed to import MD systems from the US as long as they are not operated by American personnel.

However, such a deal would still allow Washington to use Turkish and Afghan military bases, a source of concern for Tehran, since an air attack against its nuclear facilities might be initiated from either country. Iran, which has mainly relied on ballistic missiles as a deterrent against the United States (Taremi 2005), can hardly be expected to commit to the terms of an MFZ if American troops are not withdrawn in substantial numbers from both states and if there are not significant limitations on the presence of American fighter jets in the area. The same holds true for the deployment of naval forces carrying missiles, especially cruise missiles, in close proximity to the proposed zone. However, extending an arms control agreement to international waters is problematic, since the Law of the Sea grants each country the right of free navigation (Prawitz 2008: 334). So obviously an MFZ would require negative security assurances to the signatories that entail guarantees not to use or threaten to use the weapons banned in the zonal states. Such declarations have been a major component of the NWFZ agreements in other regions to which we will turn in the following section.

The past as prologue: external powers and the establishment of NWFZs

Zonal disarmament concepts have so far focused on nuclear weapons. In this context we touch upon two central agreements: the Treaty of Tlatelolco (Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean) and the Treaty of Rarotonga (South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone). Both of these accords highlight the importance of external powers. In addition to requiring negative security assurances to the member states, the Additional Protocols oblige extra-regional actors in possession of nuclear arsenals to refrain from any action that would violate the agreements or contribute to their violation, i.e. proliferation or testing activities – restrictions which some of the external powers did not accept. As a result, they were reluctant to support and sign the treaties, hindering their enactment. So the establishment of both accords can give us some insights about how extra-regional actors may undermine the implementation of a zone free of a specific weapon category.

The idea of creating an NWFZ in Latin America was born in the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis which awakened regional governments to the looming threat of nuclear war. The Treaty of Tlatelolco was negotiated in the late 1960s and was quickly signed and ratified by many Latin American countries (Redick 1981), but its unanimous acceptance in the region was only possible more than 30 years later, when Cuba officially joined the accord. Some of the conflicts preventing the treaty from being accepted by all Latin American and declared nuclear weapon states were related to the role of the United States. Washington indicated its general support to the Preparatory Commission of the Tlatelolco Treaty, but strongly opposed the inclusion of the Virgin Islands and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in the envisaged zone until a comprehensive disarmament agreement with the other nuclear powers had been reached. The United States considered the Virgin Islands part of its territory and insisted on exercising control over Puerto Rico, one of its so-called insular areas. The inclusion of Guantanamo, Cuba, where a major American military base is located, was conditioned on Havana’s participation which in turn, supported by the Soviet Union, demanded an end to the “illegal detention” of its territory and the denuclearization of all US bases in Latin America. Washington only offered to make the Panama Canal part of the zone on the condition that its transit rights would not be affected, i.e. guaranteeing that nuclear weapons can be shipped or flown to allies, while remaining under own control, a point on which it finally prevailed (Robinson 1970).

In the case of the Rarotonga Treaty the positions of some external actors were even more problematic. The treaty was the collective product of the South Pacific Forum, a regional international organization crafted in the wake of Paris’ atmospheric nuclear testing in French Polynesia in the 1980s. Not surprisingly Paris, which was determined to sustain and improve its nuclear forces and to conduct future tests, was one of the major spoilers (Power 1986: 465–7). The United States also opposed the agreement with the transit question again looming large. From Washington’s point of view, the treaty was not compatible with the ANZUS5 defence accord between Australia, New Zealand, and itself, which, according to the American reading, guaranteed transit rights to the US. Since Washington’s nuclear presence in the region was considered vital to its overall deterrence concept, the United States declared that it would not accept any restrictions in this regard (Ibid.). However, in 1996 Washington finally signed the Additional Protocol, but has yet to ratify it.

In both cases, the NWFZ agreements were based upon regional initiatives, motivated either by the fear of being caught up in a nuclear war between the two superpowers (Tlatelolco) or an interest in protecting the environment from nuclear tests (Rarotonga). External powers were in
many cases obstacles to progress, although they ultimately agreed to the accords. Additionally, except for France's testing activities beneath the Mururoa Atoll and the transit of American nuclear armed ships in Latin America and the Southern Pacific, both regions were free of nuclear weapons, Argentina and Brazil pursuing of programmes in this area notwithstanding. But the situation with regard to an MFZ in the Middle East is strikingly different since all regional actors possess the weapons at stake and therefore would have to relinquish an essential part of their military capabilities. The realization of an MFZ would therefore first and foremost depend on the commitment of the main regional players.

Nevertheless, a number of lessons about the role of external powers can be learned from the Tlatelolco and Rarotonga experiences. Extra-regional actors in possession of the weapons banned from the zone can hinder the disarmament efforts by, first, refusing to accept that territories under their control become part of the zone, second, maintaining military bases within the region (American positions with regard to Tlatelolco), third, insisting on their right to use parts of the zone for transit purposes (American position with regard to Tlatelolco and Rarotonga), and, fourth, refusing to give up testing activities (French position with regard to Rarotonga). In the following section these four challenges for the realization of zonal disarmament will be applied to the establishment of an MFZ in the Middle East/Gulf.

The lessons from Tlatelolco and Rarotonga: challenges for a Middle Eastern MFZ

Territorial disputes and testing are obviously the least problematic issues for an MFZ in the conflict region. Since the United States transferred authority over Iraq back to Baghdad, there are no territories under the authority of extra-regional powers in the Middle East/Gulf. Hence this provides no reason for external actors to refuse support of an MFZ. The same holds true for missile testing. Nuclear tests harm the environment and are potentially dangerous for the people living near the testing area, so there is a tendency to use far-removed and largely uninhabited locations. Missile tests, on the other hand, can equally be conducted on one's own territory. In fact choosing a distant location may cause more harm than good, since neighbouring states may perceive the test as an aggressive act. So it is hardly surprising that external powers have never tested their own missile systems in the Middle East.6

The issue of transit rights is different. American warships and aircraft carriers that are equipped with cruise missiles routinely cross the Suez Canal. Since these weapon systems might be used in a future military confrontation, for instance with Iran, Washington's adversaries can be expected to reject significantly scaling back their missile arsenals. However, the overall American military presence in the Middle East/Gulf would be even more problematic for its rivals. Unlike Russia and China, the recent debate among Moscow's decision-makers about setting up a naval base in Syria notwithstanding, the United States deploys missiles and troops in the region. Shortly before the outbreak of the Second Gulf War General Colin Powell, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had decided that Patriot Pac-2s were needed to protect American troops and Washington's allies. Production was accelerated - the system was still under development - and 424 Pac-2s were deployed in Israel and Saudi Arabia by the start of "Operation Desert Storm" (Sherman 2003). While Israel relied on Pac-2s to protect its population centres, in Saudi Arabia the Patriot systems were used to defend American soldiers. After the war, these weapons were still used for troop protection in the region. In 2007 the existing systems in Kuwait and Qatar were replaced by the more advanced Pac-3s (Capaccio 2007).

These weapons could become an obstacle for an MFZ, since Iran, fearing that its deterrent concept is weakened, might be tempted to step up its missile programmes, so that the Patriots could not intercept its delivery systems, especially since the Pac-3 is considered to be much more accurate than the older Pac-2 (see the article of Dennis M. Gormley et al.). To be sure, the deployment of US missile defence systems is hardly the aspect of American military activities in the Middle East/Gulf that its foes consider the most troublesome. Yet the overall troop presence in Arab countries, mainly in the Gulf, is a greater concern, above all of Iran (Taremi 2005: 96–103). Washington has systematically stepped up its military activities in the region after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 (Yetiv 2008: 28–9). According to the U.S. Department of Defense, the United States – at the time of this writing – uses military facilities in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and Egypt (see Map 2).7 Since the military bases in the Gulf could support another major military operation – in 1991 and 2003 such campaigns were successfully initiated against Iraq – Iran would probably insist on a large-scale winding down of US military presence before agreeing to reduce its missile arsenal.

The alliance factor: US–Israeli missile defence cooperation

Another aspect of Washington's security policy that, although not related to the Tlatelolco and Rarotonga experiences, could easily contribute to regional missile ambitions and therefore be detrimental for the zonal concept, is the support for Israeli missile defence. The military cooperation between Israel and the United States has included such efforts since the 1980s. In a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1986, Washington pledged to support the development of an anti-missile shield for the Middle Eastern state. One year later, Israel's ambitious MD programme Homa (wall) was initiated (Piper 2002), and in 1995 the Arrow-2 jointly
produced by Boeing and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) (Sharp 2010: 10), was tested for the first time and later declared operational. Israel manages the system independently, but receives financial support from the United States for its maintenance (ibid.: 12).

Currently IAI is working on a new version of this weapon, the Arrow-3, whose development will be fully funded by Washington (Katz 2010). Another Israeli project, David’s Slings/Magic Wand, which is currently in the production cycle, is co-developed, co-financed, and envisaged to be co-operated by the United States (Sharp 2010: 10-12). In view of the fact that the financial support does only account for a comparatively small part of the overall American military aid which Israel could easily spend on its own, deepening the technological cooperation would cement Washington’s role in regional missile (defence) policies. The deployment of the US X-Band radar system has also contributed to Israel’s MD capabilities (ibid.: 11). The danger is again that rival states which rely upon missile deterrence consider MD programmes a challenge to their security strategy, which may result in an even more intense (offence–defence) arms race in the Middle East/Gulf.

The Arrow project – the Arrow-2 has a detection range of 500 km (Army-technology.com 2010) – was driven by the Israeli idea of a theatre MD system capable of intercepting the Arab R-17/SS-1c Scud-B as well as the 9M70/SS-91 Scarab, the longer-range Iraqi Al-Hussein, and the Saudi DF-5/SSS-2 (NTI 2005). So the Arab countries, which consider ballistic missiles a powerful deterrent, may be tempted, depending on the Arrow’s feasibility and their relations with Israel, to speed up their missile programmes. The same holds true for Iran, while David’s Slings/Magic Wand which is envisaged to intercept long-range rockets and slower-flying cruise missiles with ranges of 40–300 km, such as large parts of Hezbollah’s arsenal, could convince the Lebanese militia to pursue its rocket projects with renewed vigour.

External powers as game changers? The historic role of the United States, Russia, and China as missile suppliers

Washington’s arms exports to the Middle East/Gulf were on the rise due to the Nixon Doctrine of 1969 which was aimed at increasing its allies’ responsibility for their own security (Yett 2008: 30). In the following decades anti-air missiles accounted for most of the American missile deliveries to the region, providing Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates with state-of-the-art technology (SIPRI 2010a). However, such capabilities are not as destabilizing as missiles fired at ground targets (see the chapter of Dennis M. Gormley et al.). The main recipient of US missile technology was Israel. After the 1973 War, Washington supplied the Middle Eastern state with 150–200 Lance surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) with a range of 130 km.
was negotiated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but the talks never led to concrete results. News media reports suggested that China has also delivered a range of guidance systems as well as telemetry equipment used in flight tests to Iran in the mid and late 1990s and the Clinton administration concluded that missile components were shipped to the American foe at that time too (Kan 2011: 21–2). Among the weapon deals with other regional states in the surface-to-surface realm the agreement with Damascus about the transfer of M-9/CSS-6/DF-15s in 1991 which, however, was never realized and especially the supply of medium-range ballistic missiles to Saudi Arabia in 1987/88 stood out. Riyadh was provided with 50 DF-3/CSS-2s (2,800 km) (SIPRI 2010a; see also the Table compiled by Michael Haas and Bernd W. Kubbig in the Appendix).

A new era? Recent trends in missile related exports to the region

In the last years the main focus of Washington’s arms export policy – continuing transfers of anti-air capacities notwithstanding – was on missile defence. The Bush administration’s mid 2007 decision to increase American military aid to the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council to about $20 billion over ten years paved the way for far-reaching MD related arms transfers that were negotiated shortly thereafter. The United States was asked by Kuwait and the UAE to provide them with massive stockpiles of missile defence systems and related technology. Both countries set their sights on modern PAC-3 technology. Kuwait ordered 80 missiles and technology to upgrade 60 PAC-2 missiles and radars worth more than $1.3 billion. The UAE requested entire PAC-3 systems. Besides that the UAE also asked for the import of the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, including three fire units with 147 missiles as well as nine launchers plus radar sets. The entire MD deals between the United States and the UAE amount to about $16 billion (Blanchard and Grimmet 2008: 12, 15–17). The supply of MD systems or components such as equipment to update existing capabilities could also be part of a major American–Saudi arms deal under which Riyadh plans to import US weapons for an estimated cost of $60 billion over ten years.

The Saudi Kingdom will obviously mainly procure fighter jets and helicopters, but it remains to be seen what the final results of the negotiations will be. Washington is said to encourage Riyadh to purchase missile defence systems such as THAAD (Entous 2010). However, the recent American focus on MD does not mean that the transfer of other missile systems, besides anti-air capabilities, can be ruled out. Israel and Egypt have both requested the sale of the updated Harpoon Block II anti-ship missile (280 km), while the UAE and Jordan approached Washington in order to be provided with the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, called HIMARS. The UAE has also asked for the purchase of the modernized
MGM-140A ATACM with a range of up to 300 km, so has Bahrain. Congress has already been notified of all possible deals (DSCA 2011), a necessary step in order to finalize them, but obviously no supplies have taken place so far.

Russia, on the other hand, has abandoned its previous role as a major supplier of missile systems. In Moscow’s overall weapon exports, the share of missiles significantly decreased. The Middle East was no exception. Cooperation with Iran came to an end and despite the fact that the contract with Syria about the sale of the Iskander-E SS-26 Stone (280 km) had already been signed, then-President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, refused to supply them (Vorobyev and Gelman 2005). Although there were rumors about the conclusion of the deal in the following years, Moscow stood by its decision not to deliver the weapon system at the time of writing. The UAE’s interest to obtain Iskander and Club-M multi-purpose coastal missiles (275 km) also did not materialize so far. Nevertheless, Moscow renewed its commitment to supply Damascus with P-800 Yakhont anti-ship cruise missiles (300 km).

Under the terms of the treaty that was concluded between both countries in 2007, Russia will transfer the weapons and could be paid as much as $300 million (IndiaDefence.com 2010). The envisaged transfer of this system, despite not being carved in stone at the time of writing and although the weapons are not intended for use against land targets, signals the readiness of the Medvedev administration still to export entire missile systems of major military significance. In addition, Moscow – still one of the world’s major designer, manufacturer, and exporter of all classes of air defence missile systems – mainly focused on large-scale projects in this sector in recent years. It held negotiations with a variety of regional states about their supply. Additionally, S-75s (SA-2 Guidelines), S-125s (SA-3B Goas), S-200VEs (SA-5 Gammons), and other air defence systems that were formerly supplied are now being modernized in Egypt and Syria (Rybas 2008: 36–62, 358).

China’s export policy to the region changed almost similarly. In the case of Beijing there is not even compelling evidence for the sale of any missile system in the last years. In 1998 the People’s Republic confirmed that it had halted all transfers of anti-ship cruise missiles to Tehran and would not assist it in upgrading its current inventory (NTI 2003). However, 40 C-701/FL-8 were still delivered between 2001 and 2004, although these systems have a very limited range (20 km). In addition, Iran has been able to produce different anti-ship cruise missiles among them the C-802 (120 km) in licence under the terms of various agreements which have been negotiated prior to this pledge. Saudi Arabia has approached China and tried to initiate the purchase of newer, more advanced missiles as possible replacements of the DF-3/CSS-2, but Beijing, despite rumors about an upgrade of the older delivery system, has obviously not agreed to such a deal.

Nevertheless, the supply of missile technology that continued is another story. However, in recent years the involvement of the government in Beijing has remained particularly unclear. Statements from US officials – traditionally the most critical of the role of the People’s Republic – suggest that Chinese entities have increasingly operated on their own (Kan 2011: 56–7). Between 2001 and 2010 the United States sanctioned companies and individuals from the People’s Republic between 49 and 62 times because of their alleged involvement in the transfer of technology to Iran that might be used for the development of missiles (in some cases also for weapons of mass destruction) (ibid.: 71–5). Until the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Iraq was considered to be another recipient of missile technology and in February 2011 a report to the U.S. Congress which is worked out on a regular basis mentioned for the first time that entities from the People’s Republic were involved in transferring missile related technology to Syria (ibid.: 23, 55).

Between commerce and commitment: the motives of external powers

Since the end of the Second World War the United States has pursued three main goals in the region: first, to ensure access to the rich oil and gas resources, second, to guarantee the security of Israel, and, third, to prevent any rival hegemony from rising (Covarrubias and Lansford: xvii–xviii; Zunes 1994). In recent decades, another objective of American policy has developed: securing peace between Israel and its neighbours, although this has sometimes been pursued with less vigour (Covarrubias and Lansford: xviii). Its three major goals all contributed to Washington’s policies that might undermine missile disarmament. The interest in ensuring its access to the Middle East/Gulf’s oil and gas resources has certainly been one of the major reasons for the constant presence of American troops – protected by Patriot missile defence systems – in the region. It was not a matter of coincidence that the first US forces were deployed to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Yetiv 2008: 28). The relations of the two countries – the world’s largest exporter (Riyadh) and the world’s largest importer of oil (Washington) – were characterized by a high degree of interdependence. Explorations and developments in Saudi Arabia have even been mainly carried out by American companies (Bahgat 2008: 66–9). Concerns about the security of oil-exporting Gulf states in view of the coming Second Gulf War surely contributed to strengthening American military presence in the region in 1990. The same holds true for the tensions with Iran that facilitated the construction of the new United States Central Command Forward Headquarters in Qatar. Additionally, the alliances with countries that harbour large energy resources have been strengthened by the transfer of American missile technology.

The willingness to protect Israel was demonstrated by the latter’s role as the main recipient of American missile technology as well as US financial
and technical support for its missile defence programmes. Security sector cooperation between the two countries is largely based on two Memoranda of Understanding, signed in 1981 and 1983, in which both parties pledged to coordinate their strategic planning and war-fighting capabilities. The intention was to allow Israel to maintain a "qualitative military edge" in the region. Unlike other recipients of military aid, the Middle Eastern state may use one-quarter of its funds to purchase equipment from home-based manufacturers. Its status as a "major non-NATO ally" assures it preferential treatment in bidding for American defence contracts and enables the country to acquire equipment at reduced cost or for nothing at all (Thomas 2007: 4–5). Since the 1950s, however, Washington’s most important goal has been to make sure that no rival power would become too influential in the Middle East/Gulf. Led by advocates of the policy of containment, mainly in the State Department, the US largely followed realist thinking and used its leverage in the region in order to forge alliances against its adversaries.

During the East-West conflict its main goal was to contain the Soviet Union. That is why Iran belonged to the first countries that imported American missile technology. In 1979 the Islamic Revolution prompted the Carter administration to apply the same approach to Tehran (Gold 1988: 119), paving the way for further exports to US allies in the Arab world. After the Second Gulf War, President Clinton pursued a policy of “dual containment” towards Iran and Iraq (Tanter 1998: 77), which is now applied solely to Tehran. The containment of Iran was also the rationale behind the decision to strengthen the military ties with the Arab Gulf countries, including the MD agreement with the UAE and Kuwait, although then-Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns was somewhat hesitant to admit that. According to him Iran was “a factor in this, but it wasn’t the overriding factor” (quoted in Porth 2007). Burns’ boss, Condoleezza Rice, was more outspoken about the reasons for the arms transfers and pointed to “a broader strategy to counter the negative influences of Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran” (quoted in ibid.). One of the American negotiators was even more candid when he told CNN, speaking on the condition of anonymity, that this was “all about Iran” (quoted in CNN 2007).

The Soviet’s arms export strategy was strongly driven by the desire to counterbalance the US by making deliveries to ‘countries of socialist orientation’. The Middle East was no exception. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic chaos of the early 1990s, Moscow’s export policy was no longer strategically, but commercially motivated. At the time of the Soviet Union’s demise, Russia’s defence companies had lost most of their governmental contracts or were not being paid on time. Expanding exports was the only chance for most of them to avoid bankruptcy; this paved the way for (intensifying) military cooperation with countries such as Iran and the UAE. Despite the economic pressure to initiate far-reaching sales, missiles were not at the centre of the deals. In the wake of the Soviet–American talks on eliminating intermediate-range missiles, Russia has restricted its deliveries and joined the Missile Technology Control Regime in 1995. Additionally, the Putin and Medvedev administrations consider stability in the Middle East/Gulf vital to Moscow’s interest. The fact that Russia and the regional countries have a common interest in coordinating their activities in the global energy market – together Tehran and Moscow control about 20 per cent of the global oil and almost half the world’s gas reserves (Kaim 2008: 267) – is frequently cited as a motive for weapon sales.

In fact energy-based interests have mainly contributed to deepening trade relations with a variety of Middle East states and stepping up diplomatic initiatives in order to ensure influence. Vladimir Putin’s visit to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan in 2007 – the first ever of a Russian/Soviet leader to the Gulf – was a case in point (ibid.). The new foreign policy concept – approved by President Dmitriy Medvedev on 12 July 2008 – clearly states that “Russia intends to further develop relations with … leading regional powers in the bilateral and multilateral formats” (quoted in Russkaya Gazeta, 12 July 2008). Expanding economic and political ties with all the countries that harbour the largest energy resources such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and the UAE is hardly compatible with exporting highly destabilizing weapon systems, especially missiles, to them, since the above-mentioned Arab states and Tehran have confrontational relations.

In addition, Moscow has become increasingly concerned about the security of its southern borders: Islamist fundamentalism is on the rise in South Caucasus as well as in the Muslim parts of Russia, and many of these organizations rely on support from the Middle East/Gulf. Moreover, the acquisition of short- and medium-range missiles by Iran and Saudi Arabia is a major cause of concern because of the territorial proximity of those countries to the Russian border. Although Moscow considers American claims about Iran’s nuclear programme exaggerated it agreed to the UN arms embargo against Tehran and lived up to it. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1727, passed in December 2006, banned the export of items and technology related to delivery systems capable of carrying at least a 500kg payload to a range of at least 300 km. In June 2010, Resolution 1929 prohibited the supply of all weapon categories listed in the UN Register of Conventional Arms, including missiles with a range of at least 25 km, and related spare parts (SIPRI 2010b). In view of the growing concern of Russia’s Arab partners and American pressure, S-300 anti-air systems were not supplied to Iran (Reuters, 29 September 2011). And if, despite all these points, the export of missiles to the region is taken into account for economic reasons, it is still doubtful that Moscow is willing to risk a major confrontation with the United States and Israel – the Putin administration was not and prevented the sale of the Iskander. The Medvedev government’s renewal of the commitment to stick to an earlier agreement with Syria about the transfer of the Yakhont is the notable
exception to Russia’s overall arms export strategy. Air defence systems, on the other hand, are still supplied to Arab states, since they are not considered a threat to regional stability and belong to the most advanced products of Moscow’s military companies that still depend on their export.

The Chinese government largely ignored the proliferation activities of its ailing state-owned defence sector, which had to find ways to generate revenues due to the economic reforms of the late 1970s. During this period the government promoted rather than controlled weapon exports (Fan 2008), facilitating missile transfers to the Middle East/Gulf. Most of them were realized after Beijing had initiated the first market-oriented reforms. The People’s Republic was a latecomer to many international arms control and disarmament treaties and regimes. It was not involved in the negotiations of the MTCCR in the 1980s and initially refused to adhere to the agreements’ guidelines. This changed in the early 1990s, when China, opting for expanding its economic relations, was actively involved in arms control and non-proliferation negotiations and generally decided to adhere to global norms and agreements, including those that focus on the missile sector. In particular, Beijing pledged to abide by the MTCCR’s guidelines in 1991, despite its status as a non-member state, and even applied to join the agreement in 2004. In 1994 the People’s Republic and the United States negotiated a joint statement on missile proliferation in which China agreed to ban the supply of all MTCCR class missiles. In 2000 Beijing issued another declaration, this time promising to strengthen missile export control regulations and to work out a control list, which, based on the MTCCR’s guidelines, was completed in 2001.

The reluctance to export missile technology to the Middle East/Gulf was also rooted in the People’s Republic’s increasing energy needs: presently the country receives half of its oil imports from the region. Since 1993, when China became a net importer of oil, its policies towards the Middle East have been mainly dominated by the intention to secure the supply of oil and gas (Lu and Chen 2007: 82). The increasing dependence on the region’s energy market could be seen as an incentive for the export of missile related equipment to energy-rich countries, but in fact China is primarily interested in not endangering its business relations with all the different suppliers, by and large preferring stability. The proliferation of missiles or missile technology is generally considered to undermine this goal. Nevertheless, China – almost like Russia – is reluctant to lobby for non-proliferation, if this might endanger its relations with the oil- and gas-exporting actors. This is one reason why US requests for tougher sanctions against Iran have frequently been rejected or watered down by Beijing, although it finally agreed to establish and (finally) strengthen the successive UN arms embargoes. Given the fact that Iran can hardly afford to interrupt its oil sales, since it depends on generating revenues this way, and in view of the low degree of recent arms exports, China did not have much to lose in this regard.

In addition, the People’s Republic considers missile exports to American foes in the region still as a potential response to US arms sales, especially missiles and missile defence systems, to Taiwan. China sees these deals as an illegitimate interference in internal affairs, since it insists that the island is a province of the People’s Republic. Beijing is also seriously concerned about the American deployment of missile defence systems and the growing MD cooperation between Washington and Tokyo, fearing that such systems could neutralize its deterrence capabilities. The same holds true for the Ground-based Midcourse Defense System of the United States, since it might intercept China’s very small number of intercontinental-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching the American homeland (Podvig and Zhang 2008). Despite its newly created rules for arms transfers, Beijing could not and cannot guarantee that its defence industry lives up to these laws, because it lacks sufficient enforcement infrastructure and resources. The decentralization could further decrease the ability of the government to exercise control over military companies. This is particularly troublesome, since some of them, driven by economic interest, are reluctant to abide by the new laws. Missile technology, although probably not entire systems, may therefore still make its way to the conflict region.

A forward strategy for missile disarmament: under which conditions would the external powers support an MFZ?

The United States, Russia, and China would be destined to play an influential role in a Middle East/Gulf MFZ. The success of an MFZ, ranging from Egypt in the west and Iran in the east as well as from Syria in the north to Yemen in the south, would depend on the willingness of the US to refrain from deploying missiles in close proximity to the region, to substantially limit its military presence in close proximity of the region, and to provide negative security assurances to the members of the MFZ. In addition, as the Treaties of Tlatelolco and Karotonga have shown, territories under external control, military bases, transit rights, as well as testing activities can be important issues by which extra-regional powers have an influence on the success or failure of zonal disarmament. In the Middle East, Washington could spoil an MFZ in part because of controversies on these aspects. While territorial disputes and testing issues would probably not arise, the United States does have military facilities in many influential Arab countries, especially in the Gulf, and has deployed missile defence systems to protect its most important bases and its allies. This might fuel the threat perceptions of Iran whose deterrence strategy mainly relies on missile capabilities. Washington’s decision to co-finance the most important Israeli MD systems could be perceived by Tehran as an extension of this threat. Israel’s Arab neighbours could also be worried about the MD capabilities. The success of an MFZ would also depend on the prevention of missile transfers, a challenge that involves the roles of Russia and China, too.
Based on our analysis of the motives of external powers, the question of how they might be convinced to abandon counterproductive policies and to support an MFZ in the Middle East/Gulf can be answered as follows: as for American military presence, the challenge would not only be to convince the United States to give up its regional MD systems, but to negotiate an agreement that leads to a substantial withdrawal of American armed forces from the region, mainly from the Gulf. A security accord between Washington and Tehran including conditions for the withdrawal of American troops that is mutually satisfactory would have to be worked out. Both the United States and Iran could in principle agree to limit the Iranian meddling, while significantly reducing American forces. In addition, the US would probably insist on severely limiting Tehran’s nuclear and missile programmes in parallel, if not in advance of such steps. A bilateral accord would therefore have to include arms control measures. As long as Iran has not abandoned its missile ambitions, the basic rationale for multilateral MD cooperation between Kuwait, the UAE, and Washington continues to exist and the United States can hardly be expected to change its approach. As far as the American support for Israeli missile defence is concerned, limiting Washington’s financial input would — given the small portion of the overall US military aid which is spent on MD and Israel’s capacity to finance the systems alone — probably be largely symbolic. However, the capabilities themselves can be expected to be an issue in disarmament negotiations. American security guarantees might lead to a compromise in this regard.

Regarding the sale of missile technology one can conclude that the three powers were instrumental in providing many of the regional actors with their current capabilities. Nevertheless, their export activities remained largely focused on anti-air missiles that are not considered to be as destabilizing as SSMs. Especially the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia have vigorously pursued the export of their related systems to a variety of Middle Eastern/Gulf countries and remain committed to this cause. Therefore, at least Washington’s and Moscow’s support for an MFZ would probably depend on the precise definition of the term ‘missile’. An all-encompassing definition that includes anti-air capabilities would be problematic for both actors, since they would be concerned to lose the market. The transfers of SSMs mainly included the sale of short-range missiles or related technology. The notable exception was China’s sale of DF-3/CSS-2s to Saudi Arabia; Beijing had not pledged to comply with the MTCR at that time. This demonstrates the willingness of external powers to comply with international commitments concerning missile control and their general interest – however motivated – in regional stability. The American decision-making process in the context of entering the Middle East missile game with the sale of Hawk air defence systems to Israel is a telling example. The proponents of the deal mainly argued that the sale “would fill an important gap” in the capabilities of an ally without significantly contributing to a “shift in the balance of military power” between regional adversaries (quoted in Bass 2003: 164). However, Washington’s continued export of combat aircraft would probably be a challenging issue in MFZ negotiations, since missiles are considered to be countermeasures against such weapons (see the article of Bernd W. Kubbig et al.).

Unlike the American missile (defence) transfers, Beijing’s and Moscow’s exports to the Middle East/Gulf have already decreased significantly since the early and mid 1990s. At that time Russia signed the MTCR and Beijing had begun to modify its arms transfer policies. Both actors started to redefine their strategy towards the region on the basis of a new interest in stabilizing arms dynamics, motivated either by the interest in energy related cooperation with Middle Eastern actors and the danger of being affected by the ongoing conflicts (Russia) or the need for the steady import of oil and gas (China). Both countries have pledged to abide by MTCR regulations, fostering norm construction in the missile sector. As a result, one can expect Moscow and Beijing to support the overall goal of missile disarmament, if not an MFZ, since as long as it is feasible and facilitates trust among regional actors, it advances their common interest in preventing an escalation of the existing tensions. From a Russian point of view far-reaching missile reductions would also contribute to implementing its initiative to globalize the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty since a number of the countries in the region possess missiles that would fall under this accord.

With regard to China, currently a possible motive for future missile sales to the Middle East is the conflict with the United States about the MD related arms deals with Taiwan and Japan. Hence Beijing’s support for an MFZ would be facilitated if the US were to limit its weapon sales, especially of missile defence systems, to these states. In addition, mutual approaches to missile export control must be found. Washington has imposed a variety of sanctions against Chinese companies that export sensitive technology to Iran, while Beijing rejects such measures as an extra-territorial use of US law. Cooperative steps which might pave the way for overcoming this stalemate could include confidence-building measures, including assurances that the American missile defence programme is not targeted at the People’s Republic and, most importantly, mutual efforts to strengthen the Chinese implementation of its missile transfer regulations. Washington already has valuable experience in this regard, and both countries could coordinate their export controls, while effectively enhancing non-proliferation measures. The United States could implement measures such as providing special training for customs, border controls, and enforcement officers in order to assist China in detecting and interdicting unauthorized missile technology transfers (Zaborsky 2005).
In summary, the external powers, US, Russia, and China, are instrumental for achieving missile disarmament in the Middle East. Realizing such a goal requires a future regional security accord that takes their interests into account. Hence negotiating an agreement that limits missiles in the Middle East/Gulf would pose an even more serious diplomatic challenge than the previous articles in this volume on regional dynamics suggest. Nevertheless, there is a history to build upon. The MTCR is now accepted by the three major external actors as a legally binding agreement to which they adhere. As a result, effective export controls of WMD-capable missiles could therefore be established. The resolution of the 2010 NPT Review Conference presents a new opportunity to build on this achievement. The Final Document mentions that Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (the depositories of the NPT), along with the UN Secretary General, will convene a conference of Middle Eastern states in 2012 on the establishment of a WMDFZ, including the means for their delivery. Together with China they might support the Finnish facilitator who is tasked with preparing the conference by advocating – as an interim step towards an MFZ/WMDFZ – the ban of WMD-capable missiles.

Notes
1. Sameh Aboul-Enein is a diplomat and scholar and contributes his views solely in his personal capacity.
2. The People’s Republic has virtually ended all its missile exports, but has become the main licensor of missile systems.
3. The overall export activities of major extra-regional suppliers will be analysed in the article of Dinhaw Mistry and Mark Smith that focuses on the success of the existing missile control measures.
4. See the first resolution (3263 XXIX) of this kind (UNGA 1974).
5. ANZUS is an abbreviation of the participants’ names: Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.
6. On the importance of a missile test ban as an important step towards disarmament, see the article of Dinhaw Mistry and Mark Smith; see also Aboul-Enein and Gopalaswamy (2009).
8. American defence giant Raytheon manufactures the system together with the Israeli company Rafael Advanced Defense Systems. In Fiscal Year 2010 the U.S. Congress allocated $80 million for the project (Sharp 2010: 10-12).
9. In some cases the Iran, North Korea and Syria Nonproliferation Act was applied, leaving it open which of the three countries was the business partner of the Chinese entities.
10. The ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran that provide approximately 30 per cent of Beijing’s overall oil imports were intensified – in 2004 a $100 billion deal with Tehran was signed, ensuring the import of 270 million tons of liquefied natural gas over a 25 year period and a stake of 50 per cent in the development of the Yadavaran oilfield. The People’s Republic has also expressed its interest in direct pipeline access to Iran via Kazakhstan (Zhao 2004).

References


