Keynote Address “The Outcome of the NPT”

Dan Plesch: It is my very great pleasure now to ask you to take your seats for our last presentation this morning, which is an official presentation on behalf of the Arab Republic of Egypt by Dr (and SOAS graduate) Sameh Aboul-Enein, who is an old friend and colleague of— I couldn’t go so far as to say countless discussions on the Middle East and Non-Proliferation Treaty issues but has been intimately involved in these negotiations. I think it is fitting to hear from him in a morning in which we have begun with the views of the British government, heard those of the Americans, heard those of the NGO sector. Now as one of the leading members of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, involved as a state in the NPT from the very beginning, I think he will round off the morning for us very well. Give him a warm welcome, please.

Sameh Aboul-Enein: Thank you, Dan. I have the pleasure to be back here again among this very distinguished presence at SOAS and to feel at home actually. First, I carry greetings and best wishes to you all from the Ambassador of Egypt to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Hatem Seif El Nasr, who could not join due to another official engagement at the same time. He has asked me to make this presentation.

Lord Owen, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen: The May NPT Review Conference was convened at the historical juncture where we all witnessed and welcomed the emergence of new leaderships announcing determinations and stronger political will, which was matched by public figures, intellectuals and by civil society in both nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states, aimed at the total elimination of nuclear weapons and achieving the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons. Egypt, as chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, succeeded to capitalise on this positive environment through an open, all-inclusive and transparent process of negotiations and consultations which allowed us to crown our efforts by success in producing a consensus document.

Negotiations covered a wide range of issues that were of crucial importance to the treaty’s credibility and effectiveness, on the one hand, and to the security and aspirations of state parties on the other. Three forward-looking action plans on nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the inalienable right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy were produced and
agreed upon. Plans of action reaffirmed the critical importance of achieving the universality of the treaty and putting into action an effective process to implement the 1995 resolution on the Middle East. We have examined the need for a nuclear weapons convention for the total elimination of nuclear weapons within a specific framework of time, and the need for a global, legally binding, unconditional instrument or negative security assurances and many other important issues required to bring about the full implementation of the NPT and to achieve a world free from nuclear weapons.

Egypt decided to take advantage of signs of a re-emerging international goodwill to push forward constructively, showing the necessary political leadership to make the 2010 Review Conference a success. In our view, failure was never an option.

The document represents a basis for a deal we intend to vigorously build on in the next months and years to come, in cooperation with all state parties, in particular the P-5 nuclear weapons states, aiming at the earliest realisation of a world free from nuclear weapons – where policies of deterrence have no place and where the horrible threat posed by nuclear weapons to human lives on our planet no longer exists. We are aware that the adopted final outcome did not benefit to a great extent from the elements of a plan of action presented by the Non-Aligned Movement on the total elimination of nuclear weapons and the comprehensive working paper presented on the three pillars of the treaty and on the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East. But this did not stop us from engaging constructively, achieving concrete results and now looking forward to implementing these results.

On the crucially important issue of the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, a central component of the indefinite extension of the treaty which remains unimplemented to date after fifteen years, we have moved forward and achieved progress in adopting an action plan to push towards the implementation of the resolution to establish a zone free from nuclear weapons as well as other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. This has not been possible without the committed engagement of all state parties and their dedication to pursuing this goal. Egypt intends to engage constructively with all concerned parties to implement the practical steps adopted. The road ahead is not an easy one but it is the review and its implementation which paves the way for us to move forward.
The text the document adopted emphasised the importance of a process – a process, I indicate here and stress – leading to the full implementation of the 1995 resolution. To this end it endorsed practical steps, which I call on the audience here to focus on so that we move on forward. These steps are as follows. The UN Secretary General and the cosponsors of the 1995 Middle East resolution, in consultation with the states of the region, will convene a conference in 2012 to be attended by all states of the Middle East – all states – on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by the states of the region and with the full support and engagement of the nuclear weapons states (the P-5). The 2012 conference shall take as its terms of reference the 1995 Middle East resolution.

Point two: the appointment by the UN Secretary General and the cosponsors of the 1995 resolution, in consultation with all the states of the region, of a facilitator with a mandate to support the implementation of the 1995 resolution by conducting consultations with the states of the region in that regard and undertaking preparations for the convening of the 2012 conference. The facilitator will also assist in implementation of the follow-on steps agreed by the participating regional states at that conference when it is to be held. The facilitator will then report to the 2015 Review Conference and its preparatory committee meetings. So we have a cycle there that needs to be started.

Point three: the designation by the UN Secretary General and the cosponsors of the 1995 Middle East resolution, in consultation with the states of the region, of a host government for the 2012 conference.

Point four: additional steps aimed at supporting the implementation of the resolution, including the use of the IAEA and other relevant international organisations which will be requested to prepare background documentation for the 2012 conference regarding modalities for a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, taking into account work previously undertaken and experiences gained. This was actually what was raised by the audience earlier today.
Point five: consideration of all efforts aimed at supporting the implementation of the resolution, including the offer of the European Union to host a follow-on seminar to that which was organised in June 2008.

Point six: the Review Conference emphasised also the requirement of maintaining parallel progress in substance and in timing in the process leading to achieving total and complete elimination of all WMD in the region – nuclear, chemical and biological. The 2010 Review Conference reaffirmed that all state parties to the treaty – particularly the nuclear weapons states and the states in the Middle East – should continue to report on steps taken to implement the resolution through the UN Secretariat and to the president of the 2015 Review Conference, as well as to the chairperson of the preparatory committee meetings to be held in advance of the conference.

The conference further recognised the important role played by the civil society, which is a major addition to the text of the 2010 Review Conference – the role played by civil society in contributing to the implementation of the resolution and to encourage all efforts in that regard.

The 2010 NPT Review Conference’s reaffirmation of the importance of Israel’s accession to the treaty and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under IAEA comprehensive safeguards confirms the continued resolve of state parties to pursue the 1995 and 2000 NPT commitments in this respect.

Finally, Egypt’s plans to vigorously pursue – in addition to the implementation of the 1995 Middle East resolution, the NPT text with the three pillars – the following priorities in the run-up to the next NPT conference in 2015. One, realising the full and prompt implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments by nuclear weapons states aiming at the total elimination of nuclear weapons by 2025. Two, pursuing continued focus and dedicated efforts to realise at the earliest possible time the universality of the treaty as a key requirement for its effectiveness and the global realisation of its objectives. Three, prompt commencement of negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention as the route to realising a world free from nuclear weapons by 2025. Four, commencement of negotiations on a legally binding instrument to provide non-nuclear weapons states with global, unconditional security assurances against the use or threat
of use of nuclear weapons, pending the realisation of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Five, reaffirmation of the inalienable right of non-nuclear weapon state parties to the treaty to pursue their national choices in the areas of peaceful uses of nuclear energy, including the right for a nuclear fuel cycle, without undue restrictions that would contradict Article IV of the NPT.

Egypt invites all to join us in this important effort, in the process up to the next Review Conference in 2015, to promote more effectively the three pillars, the universality of the treaty, the implementation of the Middle East 1995 resolution. It is an opportunity that must be constructively worked on in the next few months and over the next two or three years. Thank you.

Dan Plesch: Are you happy to take some questions?

Sameh Aboul-Enein: Yes, sure.

Question: [indiscernible] As an Arab, I am dismayed by the collective weakness of the Arab League and the Arab nations together by signing the NPT while Israel refuses to do so. Many of us believe in a campaign to threaten a collective departure from the NPT by all the Arab countries in the 2012 meeting unless Israel becomes a signatory and a member of the treaty. I hope that the Arab League, whose representative is here, and other colleagues will start to discuss this seriously and listen. Actually only this morning there was on the Al Jazeera website in Arabic a call similarly for all the Arabic nations to leave the NPT or threaten to leave collectively the NPT unless Israel joins. Thank you.

Sameh Aboul-Enein: Thank you for your comment. Let me assure you at the beginning that there is a very constructive, dedicated effort on the part of the Arab League and the members of the Arab League within the NPT process that has materialised during the Review Conference last May, and which has produced a very sound plan of action on implementing the 1995 Middle East resolution. It is the first time we have concrete practical steps – there are eight or nine steps – and we are in a position now to take forward the agenda with other NPT partners, namely the P-5, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Arab Group, the New Agenda Coalition, the African Group. I think there is enough concern that has become evident in the Review
Conference that the whole matter is serious and that the universality of the treaty must be pushed forward and, in that respect, that Israel should join the NPT as a non-nuclear weapons state. I think there will be consultations and a lot of work during the next year to prepare for the convening of the 2012 conference.

I may ask Wael Al-Assad to comment, to give us an expose also of the whole effort that is being done by the Arab League so that the audience will know that.

Wael Al-Assad: Good morning, everybody. I was trying to avoid this as much as possible. It’s easier asking questions from down there and attacking the speakers.

Let me first respond to the remark. The attitude of the Arab states regarding this issue is not an attitude of weakness. This is not an excuse – the attitude has always been that we have the NPT; the NPT with all its loopholes and all its problems is the only regime at the international level that allows us to work multilaterally towards arms control, towards containing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. We thought for a while, since all the Arab states have joined the NPT, that this is the way to provide us with security and the way to cooperate at the international level. If there are countries who refuse to join the international community in this effort, then we need to start working with these countries to bring them on board. If you have also within the region one of those countries, you really need to be concerned about your security. This is why we are concerned with the lack of response from Israel towards joining the NPT.

We have pushed hard and the diplomatic effort has been taking years. The Arab position is coordinated within the Arab League, twenty-one countries are pushing for one position – which is, we need to resolve this dilemma in the Middle East through a regional approach, not a state-by-state approach. The state-by-state approach has proven to be biased and selective. We speak of Iran but we ignore Israel. If we speak of Israel then we are singling out Israel. These arguments are not productive.

What do we have instead of this? We have the regional, collective approach, a comprehensive approach. We have been calling for this since 1974, creating a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction with similar responsibilities among all the states, with
transparency, thus providing mutual security for everybody. We think that this is a very positive initiative. We think it's worth working. The international community, the P-5, the three depositary states have been every year voicing their support for this initiative— but not one step, one serious, practical step has been taken. We attempted in 2010 to provide ideas for practical steps to be implemented and we came out with this document that nobody is happy with. We are not happy with it; as you heard, the three depositary states are not happy with it for different reasons. But we all agreed that we can live with it, and saying that means that we have the responsibility to work towards implementing it. We should not start stating reasons for not moving towards implementing these commitments. The UN Secretary General has a commitment; the three depositary states have commitments; the states in the region have commitments and responsibilities toward implementing that. Nobody should shift the blame on anybody.

Within the Arab League we have said clearly at the summit level that 2010 will be a benchmark for us; we will see what will happen in 2010. The summit asked the Arab League to reassess and evaluate the outcomes of 2010 and the seriousness of commitment toward it, and if not this means that this initiative of a zone free is dead. Then we need to pursue other options. When we speak of other options, other alternatives, the range is so wide—maybe at the end of it, withdrawal from the NPT. We do not want to activate this now. We are still in a mood of supporting the NPT. But of course when it comes to your security, you have to have on the table all your options available. If this is the element that will provide us with security, we will not hesitate to activate it. But there is a time for every action. Now is the time we have a good document, we are extending our hand to the three depositaries, we are saying let’s move toward implementing it. That’s the position. I’m sorry I have taken too long.

**Question:** What is the general feeling in the Middle East of countries that contributed to this about who they would like to be appointed to act? Do they want somebody from outside the region or do they believe it would be better coming from somebody within the region?

**Sameh Aboul-Enein:** You are pointing to the facilitator? Well, I think at this stage what needs to be done is a lot of hard work. It is too early to prejudge who the facilitator should be. At the same time it is part of a whole package that was presented, and I identified some of its points.
So I think at this stage what needs to be done is close consultations between the UN Secretary General, the P-5, all the Middle East countries, to proceed with trying to identify someone who will play that very important, constructive and pivotal role.

**Question:** The US ambassador that we just heard from thought that a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction was a possibility and an achievable goal, but she suggested it was achievable only as part of a comprehensive solution to peace in the region. I'd like to ask you whether you agree with that or whether you think that achieving this Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone would actually be a first step in creating peace in that region.

**Sameh Aboul-Enein:** What has happened and what we have in hand now is a text from the NPT Review Conference which has clear, practical points on moving forward on that zone. What we should do is work on implementing those points, instead of going in vicious circles about what comes first and what comes last. Again, I urge the audience to look at that part of the document because it lays out all points which are relevant.

On the Middle East peace process, all efforts are being done anyway. Egypt hosts every second or third week delegations, summits, so work is being done very sincerely and with much dedication, and in cooperation with the US and with other P-5 members as well. I share with Ambassador Susan Burk her positive note that it is achievable. Egypt believes that as well.

**Question:** Sushan [indiscernible] from CISD. I'm wondering what the position of the Arab League is with regards to Iran and its nuclear ambitions, and specifically are there any serious efforts to engage Iran on this initiative of promoting this WMD Free Zone again, given the political situation there and what has been going on over the last few years?

**Sameh Aboul-Enein:** Thank you for an interesting question. I'll take the second part and leave the first part to Wael again. There is equal interest in pursuing the zone targeted to all the countries in the Middle East, and that is the objective of the document. So yes, there is an interest that we have to approach the Israeli programme and nuclear capabilities and we have at the same time to address any concerns in the region of any proliferation, of any change of course, et cetera. But again, on the Arab League...
Wael Al-Assad: On Iran, I think it is about time to make this clear, although we have tried to say it in many fora. On Iran, we have participated – we are part of the international community, we are members of the IAEA – and we have supported the transfer of the file of Iran to the Security Council. We have concerns. There are definitely Arab states who have concerns regarding the nuclear file of Iran. But we do not say that Iran is going military with its nuclear programme. We need answers and we are asking Iran to cooperate with the international community more. There are concerns. But definitely we do not accept the argument that the real danger in the region is the Iranian file. We believe the real danger is the Israeli nuclear capabilities that are being totally ignored. We think there is a sort of purposely inflating the danger of Iran going on the military side. We need Iran to be more cooperative but also we do not need to participate in the frenzy of attacking Iran. Iran is a neighbour, Iran is part of the region. We lived thousands of years, we will live later thousands of years, and we do not want animosity over rumours, suspicions and speaking of them as if they are truths. This is the position.

This is why we said that the zone is the solution, because it would bring Israel, Iran and all the Arab states under equal obligations with severe inspections and verification measures. That would resolve many of the insecurities and threat perceptions that are among nations of the region. So we would in the end – we are not saying that Iran is going nuclear and therefore we cannot participate in this continuous attack on Iran.

Question: In your presentation you recognised the important role of civil society. I just wondered if you wouldn’t mind to share your vision of how you would like to see ordinary people taking action and achieving a solidarity on this, and perhaps in particular if you had a message for young people for what you would like to encourage them toward this goal.

Sameh Aboul-Enein: Thank you. On the formal level, let me first re-emphasise that the text has a whole point on the role of civil society, which is very encouraging. That means the role of think tanks, NGOs, research centres, centres like Dan’s and others all over the world – not necessarily only in the P-5 but in our part of the world as well. So on the academic level and in my personal view, I would say that they can share a lot. They can do a lot. Actually as Paolo said, there needs to be a serious engagement on both the formal and informal level between experts, officials, all
concerned parties, to work on such a zone. We need to enter in modalities, verification schemes, technical dimensions, how a nuclear programme is dismantled. I share very much the point raised on the South African example – we have that example and examples from other nuclear-free zones. There is a lot to benefit there. So the civil society, the NGOs, the think tanks, the research centres, can provide all that material.

For the younger generation and researchers, I urge them to have awareness – this is what I call it. We need a lot of public awareness on the realities in the Middle East, and on the realities and the truth on the programmes that are unveiling all over, whether it is in any part of the world. With particular reference to the Middle East, of course, we need to focus and we need the public to understand the realities of the Israeli programme in the region.

Question: My name is Annabel [indiscernible], SGI. Just following on from the discussion on civil society, I would really like to invite you to come upstairs to see the exhibition, which is a very general exhibition regarding this specific subject. It has been in at least thirty-three other cities in the world, and we would very much like to have feedback to know if this exhibition were in Arabic, if we could bring that to educational establishments in the Middle East. It is a tool for open thinking and dialogue. Thank you.

Dan Plesch: Thank you. I hope you will join me in thanking all of our speakers.