

Annual NATO Conference on WMD Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation

Panel 2: Addressing current regional proliferation threats and challenges – the Middle East

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- First: Introduction:

At the outset, I would like to thank you for inviting me today to speak to this highly esteemed conference in order to reflect some of my views on “addressing current regional proliferation threats and challenges – the Middle East”, and how to move forward with the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction.

In my brief comments, I intend to address several issues namely the Arab spring and the changes in the region, Potential Steps to build a WMD-Free Zone, Technical Challenges and Risks to the Zone Process as well as necessary Zonal Treaty provisions, and finally the Way Forward regarding the needed future of the zone.

- Second: The Arab Spring and the Middle East Free Zone:

1. The “Arab Spring” has without a doubt changed existing fundamental dynamics and has had significant implications on the political and security settings in the Middle East. Public opinion is already playing a much more significant and prominent role in Arab societies and in this respect, will have a fundamental role in the formulation of disarmament and security issues. Arab governments are becoming more accountable to their people and foreign policy is becoming more in line with domestic aspirations and a reflection of popular demands.
2. The convening of the conference on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, as soon as possible, is integral to the future stability of the region and the entire globe. The success of the Middle East Free Zone Conference will also be crucial to the success of the current NPT Review Cycle and its outcome will certainly have a significant bearing on future developments in the Middle East.

3. The acquisition by states of nuclear weapons, undoubtedly contributes to greater instability, aggravates tensions, and leads to an accelerated arms race in the region. It is imperative therefore; that the Middle East follows other regional examples such as the Tlatelolco, Pelindaba, Rarotonga, and Bangkok Treaties.

- Third: Potential Steps and Opportunities to build a WMD-Free Zone:

1. A more constructive approach towards engaging with all the countries of the region is required in order to guarantee their full participation in the ME Free Zone Conference. I believe that the ME Free Zone Conference and the process that follows should be inclusive to allow a more genuine, candid and necessary interaction about nuclear disarmament, dismantlement, nuclear roll-back, transparency, accountability, and verification. The region has not witnessed such interaction for many years and all opportunities should be utilized to bring such interaction to fruition. All states, including Israel and Iran, should be convinced that their long-term security interests call for a WMD-free zone.
2. To facilitate the process, all relevant international nonproliferation treaties and organizations, such as IAEA, CTBTO, NPT, UNODA, OPCW and BWC Implementation Unit should be called upon to begin a collective awareness and outreach program for the relevant cadres from the region. Again, this program should aim at addressing the main technical, institutional and legal issues related to the establishment of the free-zone.
3. The IAEA is bound to play a key role as the body responsible for effectively verifying that no nuclear materials are diverted into illegal weapons programs and that all parties have irreversibly dismantled and destructed all nuclear devices manufactured prior to the entry into force of the free-zone treaty, as would be true in the Israeli case.

4. The fundamental role of the NPT must be reinforced in order to achieve nuclear disarmament and reinforce non-proliferation in the Middle East. This is why the issue of NPT universality is a pressing issue. Nuclear disarmament in the Middle East should also take place within the global efforts made to implement the steps leading to complete nuclear disarmament as agreed in the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conference.
5. Addressing the scientific and technical dimension of the WMDFZ proposal – including institutional and legal issues – can help breaking the current stalemate in the diplomatic negotiations and make substantial progress toward the end-goal of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means.

- Fourth: Technical Challenges and Risks to the Zone Process:

In view of the abovementioned, a range of key issues and questions connected to the zonal future treaty are still pending for discussion by the region's states:

1. Which verification institutions will be entrusted with the responsibility of the zone?
2. What are the implications of non-compliance? (The Euratom treaty may be a useful example here as there is a process to deal with violations: depending on the severity of the violation. There is a range of options that the Euratom Commission can decide: from sending a warning to actually taking all the fissile materials out of a facility).
3. How can security guarantees be given to reinforce the process of the zone's establishment?
4. What role will the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, as well as nuclear safety and security, play in future zone discussions?

Thus, the following Zonal Treaty technical provisions need to be considered:

1. Dismantling and destroying existing or remaining nuclear weapons capabilities, facilities, and devices under UN verification mechanisms, as well as renouncing

nuclear weapons through refraining from conducting indigenous development and activities related to nuclear weapons;

2. Prohibiting the transit or stationing of any nuclear explosive devices in the zone, and prohibiting nuclear explosive testing in the zone (the role of the CTBTO);
3. Using nuclear materials and facilities for peaceful purposes only, and accordingly placing all nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards;
4. Establishing the necessary relevant institutions and mechanisms or entities to uphold a zone, free of nuclear and other WMDs in order to handle the issues of verification and compliance, including identifying the role of the IAEA and other relevant organizations such as the OPCW and CTBTO.

- Fifth: The Way Forward:

To conclude, I will leave you with the following key-points:

1. The Need for Capacity Building for the Zone:

(a) Constraints

At present, discussions of a zone are largely the preserve of diplomats, bureaucrats and politicians – which may be appropriate to navigating the political context, but limits the technical breadth and depth of discussions over frameworks & institutions.

(b) Technical requirements

Several layers of technical expertise will be required both to write and establish a technically solid zone, and to run, manage, maintain and protect it once it is in place. This will require knowledge of verification, monitoring and inspection; an understanding of where joint ventures might be possible, and what technologies might be associated with them; the capacity to establish, protect and maintain peaceful nuclear energy programmes; and expertise in the safe and effective dismantlement of the nuclear-weapon programmes that currently exist.

(c) Thinking outside the box ... An invitation for creative thinking

- Regional think tanks need to be better equipped to provide and stimulate considered thinking and analysis on the challenges and opportunities present in developing a regional framework. A key role for this community would be to draw out the appropriate lessons from other established WMD-free zones. Opportunities may exist to develop networks and platforms for the exchange of perspectives and ideas across the region, as well as with think tanks in the EU, USA and elsewhere, to help the discussion move beyond traditionally constrained diplomatic discourse.
 - Experts, academics and officials also have a role to play in inspiring responsible public coverage of the zone across the region that extends beyond pure politics. Reaching out to the media to provide accessible expert briefings on the concepts, terms and definitions of a zone could help to build awareness and stimulate greater discussion of the technical building blocks of the zone.
2. The establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East remains fundamental, despite the failure to convene the ME conference so far, as mandated within the NPT Review Cycle. Furthermore, this process has taken a new dimension after the Arab Spring because, as a result, civil society and parliaments are likely to play an increasing role in foreign and security policy issues and may press their governments for more progress in this field. Finally, the process to build the zone is a reality that has potentials, but with several challenges as well. However, the zone will definitely enhance international security, peace and stability. Moreover, it will promote regional cooperation on issues of common interest, including emerging security challenges.

Thank you!