



Getting the Middle East Conference Started Opportunities for Israel and Iran to Join the Process

Bernd W. Kubbig and Christian Weidlich
in Cooperation with Gawdat Bahgat and Ephraim Kam

The 2010 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) proposed for 2012 a Conference on the establishment of a Middle Eastern zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery vehicles (DVs). The latter category is mentioned in the mandate (see Box No. 1) with reference to the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East. Egypt was the primary diplomatic driving force at the Review Conference: in speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and chairing the New Agenda Coalition, Cairo has shown that its interests extend beyond mere 'Israel bashing'. Since 1990, the country has broadened its agenda from the narrow demand for Israeli nuclear disarmament to a comprehensive approach for eliminating all WMD from the Middle East. Furthermore regarding the upcoming Middle East Conference (MEC), Egypt favors a conference process instead of a single event. In its final statement, Egypt's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Maged Abdelaziz, called the 2010 NPT Review Conference a "historical juncture" which gave new impetus to the idea "to establish a zone free from nuclear weapons as well as other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East"¹.

New Impetus to a Long-Established Idea

Although no Middle Eastern state has openly declared its possession of any kind of WMD, the question of weapons of mass destruction affects the entire region. In general, compliance with WMD-related treaties in the Middle East leaves much to be desired – the region's record with regard

to the biological and chemical weapons conventions as well as the NPT is unsatisfactory. Several states have not signed or ratified these legal documents and some countries did use chemical weapons against their own population and/or against their adversaries. Hence, the envisaged Middle East Conference is a unique opportunity to contribute to the creation of a sustainable security architecture for the Middle East and to overcome the "particularly pronounced"² regional security dilemma characterized by strong mutual threat perceptions, intense arms build-ups, unilateral self-help, and permanent zero-sum thinking. Reducing and eliminating WMD in the region and eventually overcoming the current security dilemma requires lowering tensions as well as increasing arms race and crisis stability – both could lead to a reduction of the likelihood of war.

The NPT mandate for the MEC clearly states that the Conference should "be attended by all States of the Middle East"³. The tremendous turmoil in the Arab world, metaphorically described as "Arab Spring", pose a great challenge to meet this requirement. Furthermore and unfortunately, diplomatic relations between many Middle Eastern states do not give hope that assembling all governments at one table will be easily achieved. Hence, one of the challenges for the Finnish Facilitator Ambassador Jaakko Laajava (see our forthcoming POLICY BRIEF No. 6) and the planning of the MEC is to convince all regional states to participate primarily in view of their self-interest in security. Their cooperative

Abstract

The participation of Israel and Iran, two major conflicting parties in the Middle East, is vital for convening a successful Middle East Conference on a regional zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles. This POLICY BRIEF presents motivating reasons for both states to join this important international gathering. The authors emphasize opportunities included in the mandate for the planned Middle East Conference and identify key national interests on the part of both countries for participating in that event. This POLICY BRIEF argues that the participation of both Israel and Iran would create a win-win situation not only between these two major conflicting parties but for the Middle East as a whole. ■

Acknowledgements

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**Box No. 1: The Mandate for the 2012 Middle East Conference**

7. *The Conference emphasizes the importance of a process leading to full implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East. To that end, the Conference endorses the following practical steps:*
- (a) *The Secretary-General of the United Nations and the co-sponsors of the 1995 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, 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-weapon States. The 2012 Conference shall take as its terms of reference the 1995 Resolution;*
 - (b) *Appointment by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution, in consultation with the States of the region, of a facilitator, with a mandate to support 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 follow-on steps agreed by the participating regional States at the 2012 Conference. The facilitator will report to the 2015 Review Conference and its Preparatory Committee meetings;*
 - (c) *Designation by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution, in consultation with the States of the region, of a host Government for the 2012 Conference;*
 - (d) *Additional steps aimed at supporting the implementation of the 1995 Resolution, including that IAEA, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and other relevant international organizations 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 experience gained;*
 - (e) *Consideration of all offers aimed at supporting the implementation of the 1995 Resolution, including the offer of the European Union to host a follow-on seminar to that organized in June 2008.*
8. *The Conference emphasizes the requirement of maintaining parallel progress, in substance and timing, in the process leading to achieving total and complete elimination of all weapons of mass destruction in the region, nuclear, chemical and biological.*

Source: *Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (2010) Final Document, Vol. 1. Online, available at: www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=NPT/CONF.2010/50%20%28VOL.1%29 (November 13, 2011).*

attitudes towards the MEC will be crucial for success. The more states that take part in the MEC, which has the potential to serve as a regional peace strategy, the more win-win possibilities could be created to overcome the security dilemma in the region.

Two major conflicting parties – Israel and Iran – are of special interest with regard to the Middle East Conference. Gatherings on WMD and DVs without their presence do not appear reasonable or fruitful. Therefore, this POLICY BRIEF focuses on the question under what circumstances the Israeli and Iranian governments might join the Middle East Conference envisaged by the international community.

Concretizing Participation: Positions, Expectations, and Win-Win Situations

Every country has its own positions, expectations, and fears regarding a process of discussing and negotiating a gradual path with the ultimate objective of dismantling all categories of WMD plus their DVs in the Middle East. Participating in the preparation as well as in the conference process itself offers the possibility of shaping the MEC and its agenda, whereas countries that do not want to participate forfeit this kind of influence. Ignoring the MEC might lead to a situation in which either Israel or Iran (or both) are ‘targeted’ by the participating countries, a situation both states will want to avoid.

Most Middle Eastern states perceive their security situation in zero-sum terms – the gain of one side is achieved at the expense of the loss of the other(s). Any outcome of the MEC would thus be seen as a win-lose situation. This would occur, for example, if Iran participates in the MEC but Israel rejects an invitation to the Conference. Tehran could then misuse the MEC as a platform for propaganda purposes vis-à-vis Israel or the other way round (win-lose). But other outcomes are possible, too. If neither Israel nor Iran were prepared to make any compromises, these countries might impose such massive costs on each other that they end up worse off than they would have, if they had adopted another strategy (lose-lose). In this case, non-participation of both countries could fortify the current security dilemma, including its unregulated, expensive conventional and WMD-related arms races. This might constitute a strong motive for both states to move to a compromise-oriented outcome of the MEC and perhaps creating a win-win situation by reducing the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons in the region and thereby increasing the security of all Middle Eastern states.

Against this backdrop, an analysis of the major factors which would encourage participation is helpful in order to identify opportunities for both countries to participate. Furthermore, focusing on concrete expectations regarding the MEC helps discovering ‘red lines’ and areas of compromise for exploring win-win situations in a security-compatible way for the two countries and all other regional states.



Israel and the Middle East Conference

Until now, Israel's foreign policy has focused on improving bilateral relations with the Arab countries rather than accepting multilateral fora to deal with regional security-related issues. But Israel is not without any experience in multilateral settings, e.g. it participated in the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) talks in the 1990s – one of the five working groups that made up the multilateral track of the Madrid peace process.⁴

As far as it is known, the Israeli government has not decided whether to participate in the envisaged MEC. Generally, Israel was dismayed by the 2010 NPT Review Conference and its results. The fact that it was the only Middle Eastern country which was explicitly mentioned in the Final Document led to strong criticism and even reluctance to participate in the Conference.⁵ On the other hand, many MEC-related efforts have been aired in Israel on the academic level,⁶ among them a call for a WMD no-first-use agreement (see Box No. 3). Israel will probably take the following factors into account when considering its participation in the MEC.

First, Israel would surely favor a strong and security-assuring role for the United States within the conference framework. The then American National Security Advisor, General James L. Jones, stated immediately after the end of the 2010 NPT Review Conference that the “United States will not permit a conference or actions that could jeopardize Israel's national security.”⁷ Israel will probably base its decision on the U.S. determination to decisively act as one of the depository states to convene the MEC. If Israel truly believes that the American Administration supports its positions, this might create an important incentive to attend the MEC. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the American administration could and would pressure Israel to participate in a Conference within the NPT framework.

Second, Israel will avoid any attempts to be singled out or ‘bashed’ by the MEC as the only country in the Middle East in possession of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, if it perceives itself to be too heavily criticized in the run-up to the MEC – be it at the UN General Assembly, at the UN Security Council, or at the IAEA – or if its bilateral relations deteriorated, Israel might decide not to participate. Nevertheless, the



Bernd W. Kubbig is Project Director at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) and Adj. Professor (Privatdozent) at Goethe University, Frankfurt. Since 2006 he has been coordinating the international expert groups “Multilateral Study Group on the Establishment of a Missile Free Zone in the Middle East” and the ACADEMIC PEACE ORCHESTRA MIDDLE EAST. He specializes in U.S. Foreign and Security Policy, especially on the Middle East, missile defense, and space.



Christian Weidlich is a Graduate Research Assistant at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) and on the staff of the ACADEMIC PEACE ORCHESTRA MIDDLE EAST. He holds an MA in International Studies/Peace and Conflict Studies from Goethe University, Frankfurt, and a BA in Political Science from Münster University. His research interests include arms control in the Middle East, the automation of warfare, and civil-military cooperation.



Gawdat Bahgat is Professor at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C. He holds a PhD from Florida State University and an MA from the American University in Cairo. His areas of expertise include energy security, counterterrorism, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, especially for the Middle East and the Caspian Sea/Central Asia, as well as American foreign policy.



Ephraim Kam is Deputy Head and principal Research Fellow of the Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv. Until 1993 he served as a colonel in the research division of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Military Intelligence. His former positions in the IDF included Assistant Director of the Research Division for Evaluation and Senior Instructor at the IDF's National Defense College. He specializes in security problems of the Middle East, strategic intelligence, and Israel's national security issues.

unprecedented decision of the Arab states not to introduce the resolution on Israeli nuclear capabilities at the 2011 IAEA's General Conference constitutes a positive sign in this respect.⁸

Third, Israel will insist that all Middle Eastern states, without any exception, take part in the Conference. Therefore, it is especially important that Iran and Syria be part of the process, since their nuclear programs have become a matter of great concern for Israel in recent years. In the case of Syria, the Jewish state took unilateral action and destroyed the alleged nuclear facility in Dair Alzour in 2007. Syria admitted IAEA investigations only a year after the incident but interrupted them when the first suspicious traces of radioactive materials were found. If Syria, and especially Iran, both decide not to participate in the Middle East Conference,

Israel might follow their example, since in its view the most significant issue to be discussed is the Iranian attempt to acquire nuclear military capabilities. Israel, which is not a party to the NPT, has repeatedly made clear that the Islamic Republic does not comply with its obligations under the Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA. The November 2011 IAEA report⁹ on the Islamic Republic has further increased the pressure on the government in Tehran. In any case, Israel will demand that the Iranian nuclear program be a key issue at the MEC. Furthermore, from an Israeli perspective involving hybrid actors like Hamas and Hezbollah in some form should at least be considered since their large missile and rocket arsenals pose serious threats to the Jewish state. Thus, the Finnish Facilitator Ambassador Jaakko Laajava needs to find ways to include their arsenals – although it will not be easy to do so since they are non-state actors and regarded as terror organizations by Israel.

Fourth, with regard to the institutional framework, Israel clearly favors a regional approach in the tradition of the ACRS talks but could probably accept that the MEC be convened within the United Nations framework. A linkage between the NPT and creating a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East is from the official Israeli perspective an absolute non-starter and it is inconceivable under these circumstances that Israel will attend the MEC. Instead, as officials and academics across the board emphasize, the Conference should be held in the Egyptian tradition of a regional zone free of all types of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles.

Fifth, the WMD and especially the nuclear issue cannot be separated from other regional security issues. A regional dialogue will have to recognize the players' interests and concerns, acknowledge their threat perceptions as well as military imbalances. This would again reflect the procedure of the Arms Control and Regional Security talks which followed the logic of *placing weapons into the regional context*. Pursuing ACRS's goal to initially lower tensions rather than to put exclusive emphasis on the elimination of weapons per se, could probably be acceptable to Israel particularly in the early stages of the process. In this respect, the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative is living proof that the Arab states are willing to seriously take basic Israeli interests and concerns into account in order to improve their relations with Israel. Such efforts to reanimate the peace process

could be helpful because without creating a minimal degree of trust, any dialogue about establishing a WMD Free Zone will fail. In this context, the dialogue will also have to include other categories of WMD as well as conventional military capabilities, especially missiles and rockets. Israel might demand that any discussion about creating a security regime and a WMD Free Zone (WMD/FZ) in the Middle East will have to refer to these threats as well as to the overall strategic balance among the Middle Eastern players.

Sixth, in Israel's view, a single Conference is not the appropriate format to address the question of peace and WMD in the Middle East. In this respect they share common ground with many Arab countries. Instead, the MEC should be designed as a series of meetings which would allow a structured proceeding and would constitute a process with clearly set goals, time frames, and criteria of success. The setup should be based on the experiences of the Madrid peace process and constitute a more sustainable adoption and adaptation of the ACRS approach. Identifying and discussing the phases involved in resolving various problems would be helpful, since Israel favors a process of regional trust-building followed by talks addressing the weapons themselves. Such a strict sequencing in combination with resilient confidence- and security-building measures would guarantee that participating in the MEC would not impinge on Israel's security.

Iran and the Middle East Conference

The Islamic Republic was not among the 14 regional participants to the ACRS talks in the 1990s. Tehran was not invited and its traditional allies, Damascus and Beirut, opted to remain outside the framework until their bilateral negotiations with Israel were resolved. However, excluding these regional actors did not adequately address the security concerns of the other Arab states and Israel. This applies even more to the current situation, especially since Iran's controversial nuclear programs have increasingly isolated the country. The nuclear projects have been addressed through various diplomatic channels (especially the P5+1 talks), but Iran could not convince its counterparts that its nuclear activities are being pursued exclusively for peaceful purposes. The IAEA report of November 8, 2011, has raised further suspicions about the real intentions behind Tehran's nuclear programs.



Unlike in Israel, the Middle East Conference is not a topic of public debate in Iran and apparently the government has not made up its mind whether to participate in the mainly regional series of gatherings. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that Tehran will attend the MEC since it was in favor of the 2010 NPT Final Document and by implication the mandate for the MEC. The Islamic Republic will probably take the following factors into account in deciding whether to participate in the MEC.

First, it is very important for the Iranian participation that the Conference does not specifically target the Islamic Republic and its nuclear program. If so, Iran would probably not participate constructively in the gatherings but would primarily hamper the process, shape the agenda against Israel, and act as a spoiler of any attempts to discuss WMD/DVs within the Middle East.

Second, the government of the Islamic Republic fears that its participation would be a direct recognition of the state of Israel. A solution will have to be found by which Iran does not have to directly acknowledge the state of Israel at the beginning of the conference process. Moreover, Iranian and Israeli diplomats sit close to each other while attending United Nations' events and other international organizations' meetings. Tehran's participation would be more likely if low-profile individuals were chosen to represent their respective countries.

Third, Iran will probably insist that the Conference starts with the less sensitive issues. The Islamic Republic sees the need to broaden the discussion on its legitimate security concerns. Since countries outside the Middle East or extra-regional powers like the United States pose security problems for Iran, it would be important to deal from the start with all Iranian threat perceptions. Hence, the MEC must find a feasible way to factor the military capabilities of extra-regional actors into the process of negotiating a WMDFZ in the Middle East.

Fourth, Tehran would want to have its pragmatic regional ally, the Bashar al-Assad regime, at the MEC although it is currently challenged by unprecedented domestic opposition and international as well as regional pressure. The open question concerning Syria's participation in the MEC is the future of the al-Assad regime itself in Damascus.

Box No. 2: Suspected WMD Possession and Development in the Middle East

	Stockpile	Weapons Program	Relevant Research and Development
Nuclear Weapons	Israel	–	Egypt, Syria, Iran
Biological Weapons	–	Syria, Iran	Egypt, Israel
Chemical Weapons	–	Egypt, Syria, Iran	Israel

Source: Sara Kristina Eriksen and Linda Mari Holøien (2010) 'From the Proliferation to Peace: Establishing a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East', *The Nonproliferation Review*, 17(2): 281-299, Table 1 on p. 286.

Realizing Incentives and Creating Win-Win Situations for Israel and Iran

The MEC will be only successful if it genuinely promotes the security of the individual countries and the region at large and is not misused for propaganda purposes against Israel or Iran, a situation both countries are fearful of. At the same time neither Israel nor Iran want to be singled out or targeted at the planned gathering.

Despite (or because of) their similar fears and expectations, there are also common incentives for both countries to take part in the envisaged conference process. The mandate for the MEC itself has probably created the best opportunities for both countries. Designed as a skeletal framework, the mandate offers various possibilities for concretization. It clearly states that the MEC should

- be organized “in consultation with the States of the region”,
- “be attended by all States of the Middle East”, and
- focus “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”.¹⁰

Especially the fact that the Conference is to be planned and convened ‘in consultation’ with regional states and any agreement should be ‘freely arrived at’ by regional states offers tremendous diplomatic leeway and possibilities for win-win situations. These, therefore, constitute opportunities to participate in the Middle East Conference.



Box No. 3: Calls for a WMD No-first-use Agreement in the Context of a WMD/FZ in the Middle East

➤➤It is this reality of proliferation as a region-wide trend, more than any other factor, which constitutes the strongest case for a comprehensive and aggressive arms control approach for the Middle East. Such an approach must be both inclusive and comprehensive: inclusive in that it cannot exempt any particular state from what is designed to be a region-wide arms control process, and comprehensive in that it should deal with all classes of weapons systems – non-conventional and conventional alike. [...] Political CBMs could entail a series of declaratory measures which, among others, would reaffirm the commitment of the regional and international parties to the creation of a zone free of WMD in the Middle East, [...], and a declaration on the non-use of any type of WMD.◀◀

Source: Nabil Fahmy (2001) 'Special Comment', Disarmament Forum, No. 2: 3–5.

➤➤It is time for states to start thinking seriously about issues of common interest that they could begin discussing and pursuing in a shorter time frame. But the question is what common-interest issue could be achieved with small steps, while directly touching upon WMD capabilities? A WMD no-first-use agreement in the Middle East might be the answer.◀◀

Source: David Friedman, Emily B. Landau, Ephraim Asculai, Tamar Malz-Ginzburg, and Yair Evron (2011) 'WMD no-first-use in the Middle East: A way to move forward in 2012?', Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, February, 7. Online, available at: <http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291297240504.pdf> (November 24, 2011).

Opportunities for Israel

The MEC is to address all three categories of WMD plus their delivery vehicles – and not only nuclear weapons. This should give Israel flexibility for discussions since it is not the only country possessing weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Other states must also fear being exposed for having such weapons in their arsenals (see Box No. 2). They will have to provide reliable information about their nuclear, biological, and chemical activities and holdings (this applies to delivery vehicles, too). Hence, if these three categories were negotiated as a “bloc” in an egalitarian and parallel manner, Israel could much more easily be part of the discussion on establishing a WMD/DVs Free Zone in the Middle East.

In view of the low degree of cooperation and institutionalization in the entire region, joining a conference process as well as making it successful and sustainable could be a useful strategy in order to create badly needed regional bi- and multilateral mechanisms as was the case within the ACRS talks.

As Israel's traditional approach to disarmament favors a “Peace First!” strategy, more efforts on the political track, especially with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, are needed to cope with Israel's security concerns. On the other hand, there is some evidence that Arab countries no longer insist on their “Disarmament First!” position and that they could be willing to address regional peace and disarmament on parallel tracks. The MEC could be a promising starting point for intensifying and combining efforts in both areas.

The Iranian nuclear program would surely be on the agenda of the MEC. If Israel took part, it could directly voice its concerns towards Iran and could take the opportunity to establish coalitions with other Arab countries against the Islamic Republic. It could build on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative which attempts to end the Arab-Israeli conflict by normalizing relations between the entire Arab region and Israel in exchange for a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. In addition, the Arab states' decision not to introduce the annual resolution on Israeli nuclear capabilities at the 2011 IAEA's General Conference could be a sign that Arab states are willing to reach compromise

with Israel. Israel for its part would welcome rules and procedures at the MEC preventing its ‘bashing’ by Arab countries.

Israel's participation in the MEC would be an opportunity to break out of its regional isolation. Its cautious reaction to attacks on the Israeli embassy in Cairo may be a positive sign in this regard. Furthermore, if all Middle Eastern states participated in the MEC, Israel would be able to explore the possibility of additional diplomatic contacts, difficult as this may be. The country would then have the opportunity to discuss and even negotiate other than disarmament-related issues with its neighbors in a more informal atmosphere.

In addition, Israel would probably gain economically from a more peaceful Middle East. Intensified cooperation within the region might also offer access for Israeli products into some Arab states' markets.

Opportunities for Iran

Taking part in the MEC would give legitimacy to the widely isolated Iranian government. A cooperative attitude at the Conference on the part of Iran might offer the possibility that the international community and individual states somewhat consider easing their sanctions against Iran. At least from today's perspective, this is not realistic since both the U.S. and the EU are tightening their punitive measures against Tehran. Iran's cooperation could also trigger positive responses from regional states such as Qatar and Oman which unlike other Gulf states do not have a fundamentally hostile relationship with the Islamic Republic. Hence, Iran could use the opportunity to build ad hoc coalitions on specific issues. This could increase the chances that its substantive interests are taken into account.

Tehran could focus on the peaceful use of nuclear energy within the MEC by discussing the problem of nuclear safety. The military dimensions of the nuclear issue will constitute especially for Iran a sensitive topic. Therefore, for a certain time span one might consider providing a forum for predominantly civilian-related items like a nuclear safety zone, for instance, in connection with the operational reactor in Bushehr. This would give an opportunity for states such as Kuwait to express their ecological concerns; at the same time Tehran may want to discuss these somewhat less sensitive issues and provide assurances in this respect.



For Iran, the MEC could constitute a better forum to discuss its nuclear activities with other regional states. Tehran would surely not accept being ‘bashed’ at the Middle East Conference (as in the UN Security Council and the IAEA), but the MEC could be a promising way for Iran to soften the front against itself on the nuclear question. Indeed, why should Tehran cede the envisaged Middle East Conference to Israel and the United States? Iran could also live up to its tradition of supporting nuclear disarmament which started when it co-sponsored the 1974 UN General Assembly resolution calling for a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East. This is supported by a statement of the Iranian Ambassador to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, in the context of the Forum on a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the Middle East hosted by the IAEA in November 2011 which Iran did not attend.¹¹

Conclusions and Practical Next Steps

To make the MEC happen, it will be necessary to have especially Israel and Iran at the table. This would be the optimal win-win situation because it allows not only these two countries but all states present to directly express their own security concerns. At the time of this writing, we cannot exclude that one of them will reject the invitation to join the MEC. In our scheme, this would constitute a win-lose situation. In this case, the country present may use the Conference as a forum not only to put its adversary in a position to appear in a bad light, but also to express and advance its national interests. Both countries may have an interest in avoiding this very situation.

If neither Israel nor Iran attended the MEC, this lose-lose situation would aggravate the security dilemma and could lead to intensified arms races. Without Iran and Israel, a Middle East Conference would make no sense and in this case we would advocate canceling the project and opting for a more modest ‘Plan B’. This could be the case, for instance, of revitalizing the idea of the mid-1990s to establish Regional Security Centers in various Middle Eastern cities.

However, in this POLICY BRIEF we have enumerated arguments which show that it is in the interest of both countries to participate in such a process. The first set of motivating reasons concern the substance, format, and procedures for the Middle East Conference:

- As to *substance*, the 2010 NPT Review Conference gave new impetus to the long-established idea of creating a Middle Eastern WMDFZ which goes beyond the request of Israeli nuclear disarmament. Instead, the international community has emphasized a comprehensive approach to eliminating all weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles from the Middle East.
- Concerning its *format*, an NPT-related Conference, which is rejected by Israel, is not mandatory. Therefore, both a UN format as well as a regional approach in the tradition of the ACRS can be shaped and used in a constructive way.
- In *procedural terms*, the Conference should be planned and convened in consultation with the regional states and any agreement should be freely arrived at by all of them. This implies that a

Endnotes

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2. Gerald M. Steinberg (1995) ‘Arms Control in the Middle East: Global Regimes vs. Regional Dynamics’, in Efraim Inbar (ed.) *Regional Security Regimes: Israel and Its Neighbors*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 175-197, here p. 179.
3. Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (2010) Final Document, Vol. 1. Online, available at: www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=NPT/CONF.2010/50%20%28VOL.1%29 (November 13, 2011).
4. For more information with regard to the achievements and failure of the ARCS talks, see Emily B. Landau and Dalia Dassa Kaye (2012) ‘Disarmament Efforts in the Region: Lessons from the Arms Control and Regional Security Talks’, in Bernd W. Kubbig and Sven-Eric Fikenscher (eds) *Arms Control and Missile Proliferation in the Middle East*, London: Routledge, 27-38.
5. See on this, Aryeh Eldad (2010) ‘Time for another reassessment’, *Jerusalem Post*, June 10.
6. Just to mention one example, the Institute for National Security Studies convened a conference in cooperation with the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University on “Moving Toward a Region Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East: Challenges for 2012” in June 2011.
7. The White House (2010) Statement by the National Security Advisor, General James L. Jones, on the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. Online, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/statement-national-security-advisor-general-james-l-jones-non-proliferation-treaty-> (November 9, 2011).
8. See on this Center for Nonproliferation Studies (2011) ‘Middle East Issues, Fact Sheet #2 for the IAEA General Conference’. Online available at http://cns.miis.edu/stories/110914_iaea_factsheets/cns_iaea_factsheet_middle_east.pdf (November 11, 2011).
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11. *Tehran Times*, November 28, 2011. Online, available at <http://tehrantimes.com/index.php/politics/92728-iran-will-not-attend-meaningless-iaea-forum-on-middle-east-nuke-free-zone-> (December 12, 2011).

Further Reading

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- Chen Kane (2011) 'The role of civil society in promoting a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East', *Disarmament Forum*, No. 2: 51-62.
- Dalia Dassa Kaye (2001) *Beyond the Handshake: Multilateral Cooperation in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process 1991-1996*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bernd W. Kubbig, Christian Weidlich, and Roberta Mulas (2011) 'How to Make the Middle East Conference Happen, Successful, and Sustainable; A Conceptual Framework for a Track II Expert Group's Contribution', *POLICY BRIEF No. 1, ACADEMIC PEACE ORCHESTRA MIDDLE EAST at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt*.
- Bernd W. Kubbig and Sven-Eric Fikenscher (eds) (2012) *Arms Control and Missile Proliferation in the Middle East*, London: Routledge.

discussion phase is not a negotiation period; moreover, all countries have the opportunity to express their views and advance their own interests.

In addition to the mandate, common motivating reasons to join the conference process are compelling for both Israel and Iran since they allow the two to reduce their regional and international isolation. Both countries may fear that the MEC will be misused for propaganda purposes which, however, may at the same time be a starting point for Israel and Iran to develop a tacit understanding of keeping the 'blame and shame game' at a low level. In sum, these arguments offer diplomatic leeway and possibilities for win-win situations as well as constitute motivating reasons for the two countries to participate in the Middle East Conference.

As far as the next steps are concerned, it will be vital to proceed in a cautious, incremental way which takes the threat perceptions, fears, and interests of all participants into account. Without providing a blueprint for the discussing and negotiating parties

at the MEC, the following steps come to mind:

- To create a productive atmosphere at the conference table, it may be helpful to work out a minimal code of conduct which reflects the seriousness and determination of all parties to talk in good faith and to reach tangible objectives.
- A list of concerns provided by each state may be a good starting point to reach shared understandings on important issues in order to form a basis for fruitful and constructive discussions.
- In order to ease the discussion and negotiation process as well as to find a common list of priorities for the agenda, it may be advisable to focus first on less problematic issues (like a nuclear safety zone), before touching upon more difficult areas.

In sum, both Israel and Iran have the opportunity to shape the Middle East Conference on a regional zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles and make it happen, successful, and sustainable as a regional peace strategy. ■

About the ACADEMIC PEACE ORCHESTRA MIDDLE EAST (APOME)

The ORCHESTRA is the follow-up project of the "Multilateral Study Group (MSG) on the Establishment of a Missile Free Zone in the Middle East". The ACADEMIC PEACE ORCHESTRA MIDDLE EAST is a classical Track II initiative: It consists of some 70 experts – mainly from the Middle East/Gulf, one of the most conflict-ridden areas of the world. The ORCHESTRA is meeting regularly in working groups (CHAMBER ORCHESTRA UNITS) on specific topics in the context of a workshop cycle from 2011-2014. The main goal of this initiative is to shape the 2012 Middle East Conference on the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles agreed upon by the international community in May 2010.

For this reason, these experts develop ideas, concepts, and background information in a series of POLICY BRIEFS which are the results of intense discussions within the CHAMBER ORCHESTRA UNITS. In this framework, the broader normative Cooperative Security Concept will be further developed, embedded, and institutionalized in the region. At the same time, the ORCHESTRA meetings serve as venues for confidence-building among the experts. The networking activities of PRIF's Project Group are documented by the ATLAS on Track II research activities in or about the Middle East/Gulf region.

Editor/Project Coordinator:
Adj. Prof. Dr. Bernd W. Kubbig
Co-Editors: Roberta Mulas, MA
and Christian Weidlich, MA
Peace Research Institute Frankfurt,
Baseler Straße 27-31, D-60329 Frankfurt am Main,
Phone: +49-69-95910436, Fax: +49-69-558481,
E-Mail: kubbig@hsfk.de, Internet: www.hsfk.de



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