



Pugwash consultation on Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Middle East, and Non-Proliferation

3 May 2014, New York City

Report

Pugwash convened a day-long consultation on “Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Middle East, and Non-Proliferation” in New York City on 3 May 2014, involving nineteen current and former policy makers and other experts from thirteen countries.

The Middle East WMD Free Zone

Participants were asked to explore what strategy might be effective in trying to get the WMD Free Zone back onto the agenda, noting that steps taken so far on Syrian chemical weapons are a visible success in efforts to remove weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East.

- **The zone is a major opportunity, not to be missed. Once there is an agreement on the zone, verification will be possible and will require a greater level of regional cooperation than exists at the moment.** “Things will change,” one participant said, as it will not be possible to have the zone and business-as-usual regarding conflicts in the region. The problem is, he said, “once you start to open the window, people try to block the sun from coming in.” Another person noted that discussions tend to ignore the new realities in the Middle East – the “security taboo” is ending, as people are discussing now small arms, light weapons, smuggling, the fall of regimes, border issues, the new role of youth. “No one is taking advantage of this,” said one participant.
- **Russia, the UK, and the US must take action if they want a positive Review Conference in 2015.** Their current emphasis is on the need to agree an agenda and modalities in advance of a conference on the zone. Some believe this is unnecessary, and should not preclude a meeting from being convened. Some believe the conveners are not talking enough among themselves, and steps such as the US unilateral announcement that the meeting would not be held in 2012 and the Russian announcement at the NPT PrepCom calling for a deadline are examples of a lack of coordination among the conveners. Others say there are ways in which allowing variations among the conveners’ views can be helpful. Some participants believe the convener’s emphasis on setting the modalities of the meeting before convening is crucial, since holding an unsuccessful conference could “set the whole process back.” They say there is no point “holding a conference just for the sake of holding a conference.” Others say states have convened in the past on similar tricky issues with no agreed agenda and still have managed to have a productive meeting.
- **The role of the conveners needs to be decided.** Some believe strongly the conveners need to “get their act together”, and drive this issue forward. Others believe that it will fall apart if the conveners try to impose anything on the regional states, who should themselves be suggesting ways forward. This is not an insignificant difference of perspective, and some believe this misunderstanding about the role of the conveners is holding up progress on the zone.
 - Russia has proposed that a conference should be convened before 1 December. Some believe it would be useful to focus discussion on such a date, and to force the conveners to take a public position on this idea. Others believe imposing dates is not helpful and is not the role of the conveners to set dates, but rather the responsibility of the parties.
- **Serious attention must be given to the impact of efforts to expand the mandate of the process outside the original 2010 objectives.** One person said this is “most important and dangerous.” He said he is “flabbergasted” that the conveners are seeking to “bend the mandate.” Attempts to

include regional security issues and conventional arms, while important, are not part of the mandate for this process. At a minimum, conveners should “remain the guardians of the mandate.”

- One person suggested it might be possible to ask the UN Secretary General to have other baskets on regional security or conventional weapons. Some say this would be acceptable. What is not acceptable, they say, is seeking to include this in the NPT process.
- If possible to identify the instrument to continue dialogue over the next five years, this would be an important step.
- Some believe it is not helpful to seek to redefine the zone’s composition, but to use the existing definition (22 Arab League states plus Israel and Iran, i.e. – not including Turkey).
- **States must proceed as if the zone is “do-able.”** One participant said he has always believed the problems are solvable. Technical issues are not the problem, he said, but rather the “lack of imagination of those dealing with the politics of it.” Another participant highlighted some positive steps that were underway, showing limited movement. The Arabs and Israelis reportedly have sat down together 2-3 times. Iran has been present at one.
- **The zone should be raised more in other forums.** One participant raised the question as to why, with all the focus on nuclear disarmament in various forums, there is no connection made between this initiatives to the zone – the public and NGOs are not widely engaged on this issue, “It is not only an issue for diplomats.”
- **Israel should be engaged creatively.** The question of Israel’s involvement as a non-member of the NPT was addressed. One person said it is being raised to obstruct process, “It is not as if it was unknown in 1995 that Israel was not a member of the NPT.” One participant said the Arab idea of a UN umbrella for the preparatory work shows a way forward regarding the involvement of Israel.
- **Confidence-building measures should be encouraged.**
 - Regional states should ratify the existing WMD-related conventions and treaties.
 - Steps toward verification can start in the region, and progress is possible on verification issues prior to the 2015 NPT Review Conference – not just with the IAEA, but also bilateral schemes, US-Russia, etc.
 - The zone could benefit from progress on the Iran nuclear issue. One person said that if Iran agrees to something more than the NPT (an Additional Protocol 2) then this might be used as a model more widely in the Middle East.
 - Transparency could be increased on issues related to historical stockpiles, facilities, etc., for example regarding the Chemical Weapons Convention.
 - An independent experts group (perhaps under Pugwash auspices) could meet to further discussions on technical matters, especially related to verification. However, there would need to be a full range of Middle Eastern participants, including Iranians, Israelis, Egyptians, Saudis, etc. The Sesame Project was highlighted as one limited example.
- **Don’t make it more complicated than it needs to be.** One participant said it should be possible to draw on the Pelindaba Treaty (a nuclear weapons free zone that includes consideration of a state with nuclear weapons in the region). For a Middle East WMD Free Zone, states eventually would join the NPT and safeguards, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the CTBTO, and the Biological Weapons Convention – though this has no mechanism for verification, the UNSG mechanism used in Syria may be an example. For delivery systems, there is resolution 687 on Iraq, the INF Treaty, and the CFE Treaty as examples, while both Euratom and ABACC are models for civilian cooperation agreements. A no-first-use treaty would be a positive step, or a regional non-aggression pact.
- **The opportunity is now.** One person noted that the South Asian example demonstrates that the only time to get a zone is while there is only one state with nuclear weapons in the region, otherwise the debate would quickly turn to one of “strategic stability” and minimum nuclear deterrence, as it has in the South Asian example. However, a convincing argument needs to be developed for Israel to

disarm. One person asked what nuclear weapons have done for Israeli security. They have not stopped the constant firing of weapons into Israel. This person also noted that Israeli nuclear physicists are “hitting a wall” as a result of being outside the NPT. Doors have been closed to them for energy security, safety, fallout and access to the latest technologies (one person said Dimona is ageing). If Israel were to join the NPT, it would have access to nuclear safety and security agreements from which it is not currently able to benefit. It was also pointed out that if there is no WMD Free Zone in the region, Israel will continue to face a potential existential threat of weaponized nuclear program in the region. The zone will be the best possible chance for verification of the Iranian program. Another person pointed out that many Israelis want the NPT preserved. If failure to agree to a zone means this might jeopardize the NPT, then some believe that will be a positive incentive for positive Israeli engagement. It was noted that thinking within Israel on this range of issues has developed and there are opportunities for engagement that should be explored.

- A study was proposed that would address the opportunities the zone provides for countries in the region. This would include exploring the regional security setup and the types of cooperation that might follow a zone.
- Pressure may be needed as well as incentives. Some believe that if a state is choosing to obstruct this process, it might need to be further isolated as a result.

The Middle East and the Future of the NPT

Participants discussed the possible impact on the NPT regime if no progress is made on the Middle East WMD Free Zone.

- **Failure to convene the conference on the Middle East WMD Free Zone is serious, and can have a major detrimental impact on the 2015 NPT Review Conference** if some progress is not made in the coming months.
- **The NPT is weakened as a result of inaction** on decisions taken at the NPT on the Thirteen Steps and the WMD Free Zone conference. Some believe this highlights deep flaws in the NPT review process. The Review Conferences in 1995, 2000, and 2010 were all considered successful, and yet major outcomes of those meetings have not been implemented. One person said, “The games are so flagrant and unacceptable.” Some questioned whether states might reexamine their commitment to indefinite extension of the NPT in 2015, since no progress on the zone has been made in the twenty years since the 1995 package was agreed enabling the NPT’s indefinite extension. In effect, this would mean a “nuclear option” of withdrawing from the Treaty.
- **Questions related to progress on Article VI are also likely to cause problems for the NPT Review Conference.** One person said there is no “timeframe, visibility, or impetus for preparatory work.” As there is “no guarantee for success” in 2015, some believe it is not helpful to bring in additional issues such as regional security, as it will only further complicate an already complex process. One person said he finds it interesting that the conveners control more than 98% of the worlds’ nuclear weapons and yet we are discussing a Middle East WMD Free Zone.

The Iran Nuclear Issue

Participants explored the prospects and challenges facing the negotiators in meeting the 20 July 2014 deadline for a final deal on the Iran nuclear issue. Most participants agreed that significant progress had been made since implementation of the Joint Plan of Action in November 2013. One participant said the change of tone and flexibility on both sides, both publicly and privately, has been notable. He said both sides have developed empathy toward the other, and this is significant.

Negotiations for a final agreement are proceeding on the principle that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.”

While there are very real differences and tough choices to be made, both sides appear to be working toward a draft that could potentially meet the various concerns on both sides. Outstanding issues include:

- What will be the speed for the lifting (or waiving) of sanctions?
- How long will the West continue to expect Iran to be treated differently? The US will push for 20-25 years, and Iran will push for 3-5 years. Is it possible to meet somewhere in the middle?
- How to deal with some selected technical issues such as:
 - Arak heavy water reactor – switch to 5% LEU? Reduce power design of reactor to 20 or 10, shift out spent fuel (Russia has guaranteed to do this), no reprocessing?
 - Fordow – agree to change to research and development? No enrichment at Fordow?
 - Transparency and safeguards – additional protocol, code 3.1, some steps above the Additional Protocol – perhaps managed access for a time above the Additional Protocol?
 - Capacity and level of enrichment – cap at 5%? What is Iran’s current domestic need for nuclear fuel?
 - How many centrifuges will Iran keep?
- How to bridge the gaps on the bracketed language?
- Possible military dimensions remain outstanding. Some believe this issue must be resolved between Iran and the IAEA.

If a deal is not achieved by 20 July, an extension is possible and it would be in the interests of both sides. However, this would increase the political risk “exponentially,” said one participant. Therefore there is a need to incentivize the sides to move faster, which is difficult given the cumbersome need to bring the “six” to consensus. The Rouhani-Zarif leadership is the “A-team,” one person pointed out. “If the pendulum swings back, it will be infinitely more difficult to get a deal.” The concerns are not all one-sided – one person asked what happens regarding the lifting of sanctions if, as some predict, the Republicans take both houses of Congress? As July approaches, participants noted it is likely the voices against a deal will increase. There is a need to develop a narrative showing that in agreeing to a deal neither side is “giving away the farm.”

Some believe the longer-term implications of achieving a nuclear deal can lead to progress on other fronts (Syria, Iraq, maybe Afghanistan). Iran might be able to become reintegrated to a greater extent into the international political system.

Conclusion

The international community is facing a moment of opportunity regarding weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and non-proliferation. While there are positive steps that have been taken, which indicate further progress is possible, questions remain as to the longer-term impact of how such issues are resolved. Shoring up the NPT in the lead-up to the 2015 Review Conference is essential for all (including those states not party to the NPT). A key step in this regard will be to convene the proposed conference on a Middle East WMD Free Zone. Securing a solid resolution to the Iran nuclear issue is possible if political will exists. Such an agreement can serve as a positive model for other steps to ensure non-proliferation in the Middle East and beyond.

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