



**61<sup>st</sup> Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs**  
***Nagasaki's Voice: Remember Your Humanity***

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**Working Group 4 Report: “Regional Working Group – Middle East and Africa”**

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**Syria**

**Summary of discussion**

The rapidly changing balance of power on the ground and involvement of a variety of non-state actors and regional and international state actors, each pursuing a respective agenda, renders the analysis of the Syrian conflict extremely difficult. Participants agreed that the Syrian nation-state has been de facto dismembered and no parties to the conflict have the capability to exercise authority over full Syria at present. This situation is likely to continue and further erode the social structure of the Syrian nation-state which may result in antagonizing the communities living in Syria. Several factors have been identified as contributing to prolonging the conflict: external support to parties to the conflict; lack of common interests among parties involved in the conflict; lack of a clear programme for the Syrian state rebuilding process; and a disconnect between warring parties and the will of the civilian population. Given the heavily involvement of regional and international actors in this conflict, a top down approach would need to supplement a bottom up approach. A solution to this conflict will only be possible if all the international and regional stakeholders engage in a meaningful discussion. Such a discussion would be most useful if it laid open the parties' respective interests.

**Recommendations**

**Pugwash**

- Facilitating talks with external stakeholders on their respective interests and expectations in the outcomes of the resolution of the Syrian conflict.
- Encouraging research and exchange on locating the Syrian crisis in the context of broader Middle East and International politics with a view to developing farsighted proposals for its resolution.
- Developing an understanding on how effective ceasefires have been achieved in other contexts.

**Policy**

- Developing capacity of Syrian individuals and groups on the management of change in large organizations in order to prepare them for taking on future roles in the Syrian public service.
- Establishing a contact group with the US, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the EU in order to discuss terms for the de-escalation of the conflict and possible political transition.
- All stakeholders could issue a common statement on the necessity of having Syria remain one state.

**Iranian nuclear deal**

**Summary of discussion**

By viewing the nuclear deal as a significant step towards fostering security in the region, the group also discussed risks associated to its implementation. External and internal factors are likely to impact the implementation process of the nuclear deal. External factors relate to the role of regional and international actors in supporting or disrupting the implementation process. Some GCC member states perceive this deal as a first step towards a US – Iran rapprochement and view it as contrary to their national interests. The risks that various parties who oppose the deal may seek to disrupt the implementation process exists. Internal factors refer to the various Iranian interest groups within Iran's domestic arena who remain critical of the deal, pretending that Iran has compromised on too many red lines. However, the

economic benefits associated with the agreement may boost the Iranian economy and may provide a strong incentive for most internal actors to ensuring a smooth implementation process. In this regard, the decision of the Supreme Leader to endorse the deal, while reaffirming the red lines, is seen as a tactical move to reach out to all interest groups in Iran and to ensure that no political faction will seek to undermine the implementation process.

## Recommendations

### Pugwash

- Convening of workshops on the regional and international consequences of the nuclear deal.
- Exploring which lessons and experiences can be retained from the Iran deal in resolving conflicts of interests with other countries.

## **Palestine/Israel**

### Summary of discussion

Due to many other conflicts in the Middle East, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been given a low priority on the international agenda, fueling frustration on both sides. The disastrous humanitarian situation in Gaza and the economic hardship of Palestinians in the West Bank only exacerbated the frustration among Palestinians. They fail to see any prospects for the end to occupation. Recent clashes have demonstrated that the current Israeli policy is unsustainable in the long term and that serious negotiations on the two-state solution is the only real solution, even if politically it has little chance to succeed in the short term. Subsequently, all actions would need to ensure that the two-state solution remains a viable option for the future. Proposals to resume Israeli Palestinian talks are too simplistic if they do not take into account the situation on the ground. Both societies are currently too fragmented and too divided to agree on an end state solution. This is rendered even more difficult by an highly asymmetric power distribution among the two. Furthermore, for negotiations to be effective, there is an urgent need for Palestinian reconciliation and reunification. The Cairo agreement of 2012 would provide a proper framework if it were implemented. It is also of paramount importance that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, political in nature, does not take on a religious dimension. The group also reaffirmed the applicability of international humanitarian law to that situation, particularly the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

### Recommendations

### Pugwash

- Convening 5+3 workshops (P5, Germany, Israel and Palestine) to remove their reservations and encourage them to move forward with developing solutions to the Israeli Palestinian conflict.
- Encouraging Palestinians to advance Palestinian reconciliation and reunification through facilitated inter-factional talks.
- Promoting dialogue at three levels: amongst various stakeholders within Israeli society; amongst various Palestinian groups within Palestine; between Israel and Palestine (Track 2 talks).
- Encouraging research concerning the economic drivers of occupation and exploring the possible economic incentives for ending occupation.
- Establishing and developing a strong young Pugwash group in Palestine.

### Policy

- Finding structural and sustainable solutions to the urgent humanitarian crisis in Gaza
- Ensuring that the two-state solution remains a viable future option.
- Assisting the development of a legitimate and functioning administration in Palestine should be a priority for the international community.
- Encouraging and facilitating the implementation of the 2012 Cairo agreement for Palestinian reconciliation.
- Exploring a possible reactivation of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

## **Disarmament**

## Summary of discussion

There are several technical problems and challenges associated with the removal of Syrian chemical weapons from certain facilities and their elimination. In some areas, it has been reported that chemical weapons change hands and there is no solution for keeping track of chemical weapons transfers. The Syrian government claims that it does not have any documents on the use of chemical weapons. This makes it difficult to reconstruct the timeline. Another outstanding issue is that Syria has destroyed the sites. Thus it is hard to verify the volume that was destroyed in those sites which makes documentations challenging. Hence, there is no way to be certain about the full destruction of chemical arsenals. The more pressing issue is the potential use of chemical weapons by ISIS. Chlorine use as well is a pressing issue because it is a relatively easily available chemical product that has been named and attributed to both the Assad regime and ISIS.

The current UN investigation into the use of chemical weapons in Syria may lead to a lot of “finger pointing” and the likely refusal to be held accountable for chemical weapons use may not contribute to creating conditions for making progress on the ground. Another element of uncertainty, while the UN was able to investigate fairly immediately, there is still some time lost that affects the conclusions on the direction of use.

Participants agreed that a Middle East Chemical Weapons Free Zone might be a realistic first step towards a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone, although Egypt might be reluctant to abandon its chemical weapons before Israel joins the NPT.

## Recommendations

### Pugwash

- Convening workshops with Israelis and Egyptians looking at data and publish records for discussions on a Chemical Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East.

### Policy

- Establishing a Chemical Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East.

## **Sectarian tensions**

### Summary of discussion

Iran's rise in power has exacerbated fears within the Sunni community of hegemonic aspirations. This perception has contributed to fueling sectarian tensions across the region through a political instrumentalization of sectarian differences. This has added a new dimension to several conflicts. There is an urgent need to reduce politically designed sectarian tensions in order to prevent the region from sliding deeper into conflict. In this regard, relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are perceived as critical in order to allow the region to work towards peace and stability.

### Recommendations

#### Pugwash

- Convening workshops to discuss worries and concerns expressed by Gulf countries with regards to Iran's perceived increase in power.
- Convening workshops on the nature of US commitments to regional actors.
- Encouraging research and exchange on the process of the instrumentalization of sectarian differences in the Middle East.
- Encouraging research and documentation on practices, experiences and lessons of democratic transition in the MENA region since 2011.

#### Policy

- Fostering security talks among GCC and Iran in order to address trust gaps in the region and promote

confidence building measures.

## **Other issues**

### Recommendations

#### Pugwash

- Convening workshops to develop an understanding of local expectations with regards to a constructive role of external actors in the region.

#### Policy

- In order to avoid the deterioration of US-Russia relations impacting negatively the Middle East, both sides are invited to consider harmonizing their policies to advance identified common interests.