



Pugwash Consultation

"The WMD-free-zone in the Middle East: What next?"

4 May 2017

Mission of the Arab League, Vienna

On 4 May 2017, Pugwash held a round-table event on prospects for a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East jointly with the Mission of the League of Arab States in Vienna. More than 75 participants from State Missions, International Organizations, and academia engaged in a lively discussion on the importance of the issue to the health of the global nuclear regime and NPT. The present report is a summary of the main topics discussed, prepared by the rapporteurs.¹

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- A central concern was that, at the moment, the NPT does not provide a clear roadmap to achieve a Zone free of WMD in the Middle East. Many participants noted that, in the context of the lack of final document at the 2015 Review Conference and the inability to hold the Regional Conference in 2012 that was decided by the 2010 Review Conference, the mandate of 1995 for establishing the Zone nonetheless remains.
- Establishing the Zone should not be seen as simply a regional concern; it is a crucial component of the NPT as part and parcel of the package that allowed its indefinite extension. Beyond that, it would play a fundamental role for regional and global security.
- In this context, there is an urgent need for a vision to re-engage in a process of dialogue leading to a roadmap for implementing the 1995 resolution. It was pointed out that the 2010 document was merely a specification of how to implement this mandate but that this should be considered as one mechanism amongst other possibilities.
- It was noted that since 2015 there has been very little movement toward the Zone, despite some useful 'track 1.5' or 'track 2' meetings. In this time, the regional security situation has gravely worsened – however, this should not prevent further efforts. Although the negotiation of the zone would not solve all regional security issues, it would contribute to improve the regional dynamics by building mutual confidence.

¹ The rapporteurs for this report were Roberta Mulas and Poul-Erik Christiansen, Projects Assistants, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. Please note that the views presented here represent a range of opinions expressed in the meeting, and they do not necessarily reflect the personal views of the rapporteurs, nor of the Pugwash Conferences as an organization. The meeting was held according to traditional Pugwash/Chatham House rules to enable an open exchange of perspectives and exploration of creative possibilities for ways forward. Thus, the substance of the discussions can be reported out, but no item discussed can be attributed to any one individual. There was no attempt to seek consensus, and in fact the sharing of diverse views was encouraged.

- As such, there were different suggestions on who should be responsible for the next steps and what those steps should be. Some participants argued for a more decisive involvement of the three co-sponsors of the 1995 Middle East resolution (Russia, US, and UK). Others stressed that regional states, having the highest stake in the success of the initiative, should engage more, both among themselves and with other concerned parties.
- There was a sense that the establishment of the Zone would ultimately require the active involvement of all sides, despite possible disagreement on who should take the lead in drafting an initial proposal.
- The Arab League's initiative to convene an advisory body on the matter (the 'wise men's commission') was seen as a positive effort to reach a joint position on the matter, despite the fact that the commission did not issue an outcome document.
- In particular, it was deemed to be important that the three co-sponsor states forge a united position, beyond rhetorical support expressed in the joint statement to the UN General Assembly's First Committee in October 2016. It was pointed out that only Russia has been pro-active in consultations with regional states.
- It was recognized that including all regional states in a process of dialogue is important. However, convening any meeting would require the involvement of external actors, given that several states within and beyond the Middle East have difficulties in engaging with other Middle Eastern states.
- Another topic of discussion was the connection between the Zone and the on-going negotiation of a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination. It was noted that such a treaty would essentially apply the enhanced standards of NWFZs to the whole world, thus reinforcing the legal framework within which regional agreements (such as in the Middle East) can be negotiated.
- International organisations, such as the UN, the IAEA, the CTBTO, and the OPCW, could play a role in furthering the objectives of a WMD free zone in the Middle East. The continued commitment of the United Nations to the zone was considered crucial under the new Secretary General and his High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. Moreover, initiatives for taking stock of existing regional free zones, such as the 2011 IAEA forum, were considered a useful exercise to be built upon.
- Pending an official regional summit, some suggested to proceed on confidence-building measures and initiatives such as a commitment to share civilian nuclear plans among regional states or even involving them in a mutual agreement not to attack nuclear facilities, which is absolutely consistent with the IAEA General Conference resolution of 1990 GC(XXXIV)/RES/533.
- In the meeting, there was consensus that the issue of creating a WMD free zone in the Middle East should be further pursued at any cost, and that the next NPT Review Conference should again promote the idea of building such a Zone at the earliest opportunity.

*Pugwash would like to thank the Mission of the League of Arab States in Vienna
for their generous hosting of the event.*