

Working Group 4: Middle East Security

Convenors: Arnold Luethold, Erzsébet Rózsa

Rapporteurs: Ezra Friedman, Kevin Miletic¹

Israel and Palestine: Why Gaza must not be ignored

Introduction

In its second session, the Middle East Working Group discussed the economic and humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. In the discussion both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives were shared. The working group also discussed possible contributions that Pugwash could provide in order to help alleviate the situation in the Gaza Strip.

Conclusion and recommendations

Pugwash considers the Gaza Strip a disaster zone and is seriously concerned with the humanitarian situation of its population. Pugwash believes that a continuation of the status quo in the Gaza Strip will fuel hatred and extremism and have adverse effects on the security of the people in Gaza and the wider region. The Pugwash Conference calls on all relevant regional parties including: Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the defacto government in the Gaza Strip to overcome their political differences and to intensify cooperation, in order to find solutions to urgent humanitarian problems of the population in Gaza, to resume investments in infrastructure, to allow the unhindered movement of goods and people and to lay the foundations for sustainable development.

Recommendations to Pugwash:

- to facilitate track II meetings for relevant regional parties in order to devise concrete measures to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and agree on options for reducing tensions, building confidence and investing in sustainable development
- to explore whether the discussions on the Arab Peace Initiative can be resumed despite the various political differences among Arab states

JCPOA

Introduction

In its third session, the Middle East Working Group discussed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of action (JCPOA) and the current challenges that the deal is facing. During the discussions both an Iranian perspective and an American perspective were presented along with other relevant international and regional perspectives. The working group also discussed possible contributions that could sustain the JCPOA in its current form.

Conclusion and recommendations:

¹ As is customary for all Pugwash participants, the rapporteurs served their roles strictly in their personal capacity. The views expressed in this report do not represent the position, views, or policy recommendations of their respective institutions.

Pugwash considers the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) a major achievement within the nuclear realm and a crucial milestone that must remain intact. Pugwash believes that the potential dissolution of the JCPOA could lead to further instability, and potentially even conflict in the region. The Pugwash Conference calls on all relevant parties including: the P5 +1 and Iran to overcome their political differences and to adhere to their commitments under the JCPOA. The Pugwash Conference believes the JCPOA is the only viable option for addressing the concerns of all relevant parties.

To all parties of the JCPOA

- To abide by their commitments under this Agreement;

More specifically to China, the European Union, Iran and Russia

- To begin a dialogue on the steps to be taken at expiration of the JCPOA ().
- To seek to increase the economic benefit resulting from the JCPOA with a special emphasis on the private sector.

Syria – Can international actors agree on ending the conflict

Introduction:

In its fourth session, the Middle East Working Group discussed the conflict in Syria and the current impediments to its resolution. During the discussions, a Russian perspective, an Iranian perspective and an American perspective were presented on the conflict. The participants then proposed several possible steps Pugwash could take towards conflict resolution.

Conclusion:

The constant fighting on the ground and involvement of a variety of non-state actors and regional and international state actors, each pursuing their respective agendas, 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 all of Syria at present. Thus, there is no military solution in sight, only a political settlement can end the conflict. Several factors have been identified as contributing to the conflict: the lack of a common strategy to defeat ISIS; the lack of a clear program to facilitate conflict resolution; the lack of legitimacy of local parties involved in the conflict; clash of interests among parties involved in the conflict; and the absence of a roadmap for the Syrian state rebuilding process. A solution to this conflict will only be possible if all the international, regional and local stakeholders engage in a meaningful discussion. Such a discussion would be most useful if it laid open the parties' respective interests.

Recommendations to Pugwash:

- Recommend that Pugwash informs policy on the basis of Track II discussion where the views of all parties are expressed.
- Recommend that Pugwash provides a platform for Syrians to take ownership in the conflict resolution and state building processes.
- Recommend that Pugwash convenes Track II discussion focusing on the development of a common strategy to defeat ISIS.

- Recommend that Pugwash facilitates talks with external stakeholders on their respective interests and expectations in the outcomes of the resolution of the Syrian conflict.

Yemen – What does it take to end the war?

Introduction:

In its fifth session, the Middle East Working Group discussed the conflict in Yemen and the current impediments to its resolution. During the discussions, not only was a Yemeni perspective shared but the humanitarian crisis was raised as an area of particular concern to the participants. The participants then proposed several possible steps Pugwash could take towards bringing the relevant local, regional and international parties together to begin dialogue.

Conclusion:

The participants agreed that the ongoing conflict in Yemen, and siege-like situations in parts of the country, has brought about a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. The local population is suffering acute shortages in food and safe drinking water resulting in serious malnutrition and a cholera outbreak across the country. The lack of electricity and sewage system coupled with limited access of nongovernmental organizations to the local population continues to compound a worsening situation. Competing interests of local parties involved in the conflict as well as the intervention of regional and international actors has added a layer complexity to the situation. The participants also stressed the connection between the flow of arms and munitions and the perpetuation of the conflict. Participants agreed that steps must be taken in order to encourage as well as facilitate dialogue between the relevant actors in the conflict.

Recommendations to Pugwash:

- Recommend to Pugwash to increase awareness of the conflict and the need for urgent humanitarian relief in Yemen.
- Recommend to Pugwash to facilitate dialogue between local actors within Yemen.
- Recommend to Pugwash to facilitate dialogue between regional and international players participating in conflict in Yemen.
- Recommend to Pugwash to clarify the terms needed by all relevant parties to end the conflict.
- Recommend to Pugwash to officially issue a statement calling on all parties to respect International Humanitarian Law in the conflict zone.
- Recommend to Pugwash to facilitate track II dialogue meetings between relevant actors so as to discuss the feasibility of local ceasefires.
- Recommend to Pugwash to explore the possibility of replicating the safe zone currently adjacent to the shared Oman-Yemen border in other parts of Yemen.

Summary Session

Introduction

In its sixth and final session, the Middle East Working Group discussed the role that Pugwash

can play moving forward in the region, specifically what it should do differently and what it should focus on as well as how best to mobilize its financial and human resources?

Conclusions:

The participants agreed that bringing young people from the region is important for fostering understanding across divides. In this regard the participants highlighted the ISYP/DCAF MENA Region Conference that took place in Cyprus in November 2016. It was agreed by participants the need for Pugwash to refocus on conflicts that are of lower profile, amongst which the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the Yemen Conflict were emphasized. Participants strongly encouraged the need for impartiality while adhering to the values of Pugwash in conflict zones. In conclusion, participants agreed for the need for Pugwash to focus on areas to foster understanding on issues of common interest.

Recommendations to Pugwash:

- Recommend to Pugwash to search for relevant partners and funding.
- Recommend to Pugwash to facilitate a meeting of young people from region to exchange views and information on areas of mutual concern.
- Recommend to Pugwash to focus on issues that are common to the whole region, within the realm of refugees, climate change and regional security issues.
- Recommend to Pugwash to explore the option of holding a Pugwash conference in Ramallah or Jericho to revive Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.
- Recommend to Pugwash the need to focus on global common issues that emphasize our commonality.
- Recommendation to Pugwash to adopt a forward-looking approach to issues within the region.