



Third Cooperative Idea Two Ready-to-Start Gradual Measures

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States in the Middle East/Gulf should consider practical, ready-to-start measures to address the technical and organisational aspects of regional security and bypass the political disagreements on a regional weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone (WMDFZ). Firstly, establishing a comprehensive expert group on the verification of arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament would increase confidence in the ability to sustain the provisions of a zonal arrangement. Secondly, creating a regional security centre would provide an institutional mechanism that would facilitate the conversation from within the region and enhance cooperation.

Background and Context: The Need to Create New Momentum

The goal of establishing a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East/Gulf is shared in principle by all governments in the region. While the 2012 regional conference mandated by the 2010 NPT Review Conference did not take place (Kubbig and Weidlich, 2015), there is dire need to follow up on the momentum that the consultations on the WMDFZ have created.

Beyond the political disagreements and strategic realities brought about by ongoing conflicts, there are specific technology and policy challenges associated with implementing a regional WMDFZ. Since there is no precedent for such zonal arrangements, the technical and organisational aspects of implementation need to be identified. To this end, there are two ready-to-start Cooperative Ideas that regional states could consider: 1. establishing a comprehensive expert group on verification measures; and 2. creating a regional security centre.

These measures could help the region to move beyond the lack of a process and the preconceived notion that an indigenously generated regional arms control and non-proliferation process is not possible. Taking practical steps towards the long-standing WMDFZ goal is possible by focusing on the substantive issues rather than the political impasse. Discussions on creating building blocks towards the negotiation and implementation of a WMDFZ provide opportunities for near-term confidence building and cooperation.

First Ready-to-Start Gradual Measure: Establishing a Comprehensive Expert Group on Verification Measures

The 1995 NPT Review Conference Resolution on the Middle East called on all states in the region “to take practical steps towards the establishment of an effectively verifiable” WMDFZ. However, much like the principles of the WMDFZ, the verification objectives and the mechanisms required to overcome regional limitations still remain undefined. If the zone is to become a reality, verification will be an essential component to deter non-compliance in a region characterised by deep historical mistrust. In other words, a zone would not be possible if it is not verifiable. Since verification issues by themselves are not obstacles to beginning the negotiations on the zone, establishing a comprehensive expert group composed of international and regional subject-matter specialists can increase confidence in the ability to verify the provisions of a WMDFZ.

Recognising these needs, the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Working Group created by the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference had held an inter-sessional verification seminar in July 1993. The United States and Russia were co-mentors on declaratory measures and verification. With the collapse of the process, regional states need to identify what the required tasks are to create a WMDFZ and ensure the enforcement of, compliance with, and verification of the regime. At a minimum, these tasks are the verification of dismantlement and disarmament, the verification of compliance, a compliance judgement authority, and an enforcement authority.

This new Cooperative Idea, advocated by Andreas Persbo, proposes the establishment of a regional group of verification and implementation experts (Persbo, 2012). The aim would be the discussion of and negotiations towards the establishment of a tailored Middle East verification regime that is viable and indigenous.

The expert group would discuss various verification models by assessing the capabilities and asymmetries in the region. Common verification measures include managed access, information barriers, and host/inspector roles. Naturally, verification protocols and requirements would be different for each category of weapons. The experts would work to identify and effectively address verification challenges in the Middle East related to arms control, disarmament, and compliance with and the implementation of a WMDFZ. To this end, they could choose to rely on the existing mechanisms under existing international regimes, create a tailor-made regional verification mechanism, or establish a hybrid mechanism.

Given the particular needs of the region, the process is likely to be based on tailor-made arrangements. However, the process could be mentored by international verification organisations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Organisation through regional verification activities, training and other educational tools. These activities could be based on the UK-Norway Initiative on nuclear warhead disarmament verification and the Colombo Initiative on ballistic missile dismantlement verification. Such interactions would contribute



to capacity building to address the lack of expertise and knowledge on verification in the Middle East.

Possible constraints on discussing verification would be the political linkages among the disarmament of different categories of weapons in the region and the lack of experience of biological weapons. However, the segregation of political disagreements from the operational aspects of developing a verification regime could bypass these issues. Convening a group of technical experts would also be financially feasible.

Creating a regional expert group on verification would help to identify the unilateral, regional, and international technical steps unrelated to politics. It would also contribute to clarifying the principles of the WMDFZ and the scope of its prohibitions. As a next step, regional delegations could consider pledging their support to this measure.

Second Ready-to-Start Gradual Measure: Creating a Regional Security Centre

There is universal consensus on the absence of an institutional mechanism in the Middle East to discuss WMD issues and regional security concerns. Historically, the only forum in the Middle East for discussion that had the potential of producing a regional security agreement beyond traditional and unfruitful national statements was the ACRS Working Group.

Major positive outcomes of this Working Group included the following:

1. The Declaration of Principles and Statements of Intent on Arms Control and Regional Security;
2. The establishment of a regional security centre in Jordan and two affiliated institutions in Qatar and Tunisia; and
3. The establishment of a communications network by end-user stations in capitals to convey information regarding the ACRS process (based on the one developed by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe to facilitate urgent communication during emergency situations).

However, these measures were not adopted by regional states when the formal talks ended in 1995 (Dassa Kaye, 2001).

The Middle East needs a regional security

centre to establish sustainable, continuous communication among all regional parties under an adequate institutional framework without the need for external facilitation. This framework would be independent from the existing non-proliferation regimes, which do not have universal participation, and would constitute a regional convening authority. Having an indigenous convener would also satisfy the condition that in order to relaunch a new communication and conference process, the effort should be initiated by regional players and not the co-conveners (i.e. Russia, the UK, and the US in the past) or the facilitator.

The centre would bring together regional experts to meet regularly and discuss issues to make substantive and lasting contributions to the security debates. As the ACRS experience proved, having a forum beyond the official Track I discussions to negotiate confidence-building measures would be fruitful. At this regional security centre, Track II meetings could be convened on various issues.

From an institutional perspective, this centre could become the future regional WMDFZ secretariat as an umbrella organisation. It would contribute to the definition of regional security issues, identify mutual concerns in the context of WMD-FZ negotiations, and report on progress. While creating a new institution requires political will and involves financial costs, this institutional capacity is crucial for developing confidence and enhancing cooperation.

Conclusion: The Time for Implementing These Two Cooperative Ideas is Overdue

Today's emerging security challenges require less country-specific and more cross-cutting measures, especially in the Middle East, where borders are often within kilometres of each other. There is no doubt that practical measures towards a WMDFZ should be collaborative. Having indigenous regional mechanisms would broaden the narrow political rivalries around disarmament issues and non-participation to include existing non-proliferation regimes.

Establishing a comprehensive group of experts on verification and a regional security centre are not mutually exclusive next steps, since the centre could also serve as a

convener of such expert meetings. Keeping in mind that the regional participants to the ACRS talks had agreed on Jordan as the host country of such a centre, regional states could pick up on the idea and make use of Jordan's political stability and well-established scientific infrastructure. ■

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