

2.2 (Suto/Mukai)
56th Pugwash Conference
Cairo, Egypt, 11-15 November 2006

A Place for Talks:

Proposal for a Breakthrough Regarding the Establishment of a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East

Takaya SUTO¹
Wakana MUKAI²

Introduction

One considerable measure to promote security and stability in a selected area is to make certain agreements within that region in creating a “secured area.” Nuclear Weapons Free Zones (NWFZs) have been established, thus, for the abolishment of nuclear weapons in a certain geographic sphere as well as the elimination of the dangers that may occur of being involved in a nuclear war³.

Similar to this is the move towards establishing a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ). This proposal is focused primarily on the Middle East region for a more secure environment to be achieved. Regarding various initiatives and proposals in this respect, however, no impressive progress has been seen since the 1970s. Why has the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (MEWMDFZ) not succeeded? What is necessary for definite progress? In this paper, we argue that little success can be expected on the official level under the current circumstance: hence, a suggestion for a track II level initiative will be made.

First, general ideas of a MEWMDFZ will be briefly outlined: its origin and the reason why we need to promote this measure. Next, the reasons for stagnation will be designated: when it comes to security related issues, many initiatives have either failed or stagnated. And finally, a proposal for breaking the ice for progress will be presented: we try to elaborate this task by placing a hint in CSCAP, a move within the Asia Pacific region.

1. The general idea of a MEWMDFZ

1-1. origin

The origin of a NWFZ in the Middle East was first proposed by Iran, in support by Egypt in 1974⁴. Israel had long abstained from voting since the proposal was first and foremost aimed at its containment. Israel is not a member to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), and is known for its nuclear threshold: however, by the effort of Egypt, all of the countries in the region finally came in voting unanimously towards the establishment of such a zone afterwards⁵.

At the 65th United Nations General Assembly in 1991, a resolution calling for the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East was adopted. This resolution was quite unique compared to the former ones in the sense that it contained the phrase “zone free of weapons of mass destruction.” This new concept, introduced primarily by

President Mubarak of Egypt in 1990, later became widely accepted in the international community.

Because strategic situations in the Middle East are heavily dependent on deterrent based on weapons of mass destruction, measures that include the reduction and/or the limitation of weapons cannot be exclusively on nuclear. The nuclear capability of Israel has created severe hostility among the Arab States: Egypt and Syria obtain chemical weapons to adapt to the security situation, while, Iran may be on the verge of obtaining nuclear weapons capability: and Saudi Arabia is not a member of the Biological Weapons Convention to name a few⁶.

Following the situation of Iraq in 1991, the United Nations Security Council recognized “the threat that all weapons of mass destruction pose to peace and security in the area and of the need to work towards the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of such weapons.”⁷

In May 1995, parties participating in the NPT Review and Extension Conference adopted a resolution on the Middle East⁸. It was highly recognized in this resolution that peace process contributed to the establishment of a NWFZ as well as a WMDFZ.

1-2. why the need for a MEWMDFZ

While there are many factors that stagnate the process of the establishment of a MEWMDFZ, there are, at the same time, many reasons why we must firmly keep up the work. First, as mentioned above, the process towards the establishment of a MEWMDFZ is one of the four pillars of the 1995 NPT Review conference package deal⁹. To ignore this key component indicates that the integrated nature of the package itself is seeing corruption. Second, ever since the 9.11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the issues regarding WMDs have become extremely acute. Because the Middle East is seen as one of the most likely hotbeds of terrorist groups throughout the world, the existence of WMDs itself in this region can be thought very dangerous. No matter how strict the controls over these weapons may be, we can never be certain of the likelihood of them falling into the hands of terrorists. Third, problems regarding Iran have become crucial. However, these problems, as complicated as they are, cannot be managed respectively: many interconnections and linkages can be sorted out among them, and therefore, must be dealt comprehensively with the establishment of a WMDFZ. Fourth, the issue of WMDs in the Middle East casts serious impact not only on the region itself, but also on the international nonproliferation regime. Egypt has continuously been opposing to the IAEA Additional Protocol becoming universal due to the reason that to cast heavy restrictions on the non-nuclear weapons states of the NPT while ignoring issues concerning Israel, on the other hand, is totally unacceptable¹⁰.

If we are to close our eyes to these graving situations in the Middle East, more and more WMDs will eventually see proliferation. Furthermore, the lack of communication within the region may result in an undesired conflict. If so, the situations will become worse, since WMDs do exist and will increase in the future. In short, there is an urgent need to prevent this scenario from happening, by making every effort to reduce tensions in the region. This process will contribute not only to the Middle East itself, but also to the international community as a whole in gaining peace and security.

2. Reasons for stagnation

But the situation in the Middle East regarding WMDs has not seen any progress at the moment. Why is this so and what are the reasons?

2-1. the existence of WMD as a deterrent tool

Why is there so much weight on weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East? According to Spiegel, there are three main reasons that can be issued out¹¹. First, countries in the Middle East need security. This is the simplest, yet the most basic and inevitable reason for countries to obtain WMDs. Second, among the WMDs, especially chemical and biological weapons tend to be remarkably cheaper than large arsenals of conventional weapons. Since most countries in the Middle East have less money than they wish for, they have an urgent need in seeking cheaper weapons to secure themselves. Third, as a non-security related reason, Spiegel points out that obtaining WMDs, especially nuclear weapons, bring about tremendous prestige to the country.

All of the reasons raised above are based on deterrence. Especially, since the Israeli-Arab confrontation is tense, Israel bases its strategies primarily on deterrence considerations. This has long been a consensus among Israeli leaders. In response to this behavior, the Arab states have no other choice but to secure themselves with similar weapons. This is the widely accepted theory in the region.

2-2. undetermined geography

In a conflictual region, the core sector is defined in terms of potential or actual states that might be involved in military confrontation in which nuclear as well as biological and chemical capabilities or threats could play a role¹². However, in the case of a MEWMDZFZ, the range of the region has not yet been clearly stated¹³.

The crucial purpose of establishing a NWFZ and/or a WMDFZ adds up to reducing threats within the region. Furthermore, the establishment of a zone will protect countries within the zone from threats that are imposed from external powers. To excuse one side of the two feuded polls from the plan is, therefore, not acceptable: it may build a temporary security, but it will not last long. This will eventually lead the region to another conflict. Hence, as the Arab League puts it, to include Iraq, Iran and Israel will become strongly essential.

Moreover, the issue regarding Libya was an astonishing yet positive move. It is true that whether Libya may be included in the Middle East region or not is an issue itself: nevertheless, its dismantlement which will indeed become a strong role model for countries that wish to continue the process of nuclear disarmament.

2-3. the lack of the understanding of a “common security”

While Iran and Egypt claimed the establishment of a zone via international fiat, namely the United Nations, Israel, on the other hand, had a different opinion. Their advocacy was to set up a table for direct negotiation among the involved countries within the region. This collision has long been one of the main reasons for stagnation.

This may be deeply connected to the way countries view the peace process in the Middle East. Israel is unwilling to negotiate such a zone until the conclusion of a comprehensive peace in the entire region has been achieved. _Egypt, on the other hand, insists that the establishment of the zone will eventually lead the region to peace. Israel’s attitude may be thought as a direct opposition to the growing regional attitudes

that nuclear disarmament is an essential goal.

If the main objective of any measure initiated within the region is to create a safer and more secure environment, these measures must rest on a common security widely shared among all countries that are involved. The lack of such common understanding will take us no where.

3. Establishing a place for talks

If we think about the ways in which we usually start tackling problems in general, most people would notice that a certain arena for discussions is made. In such circumstance, the same theory may be adopted to the Middle East as well. The debate over confidence building vs. peace process vs. the establishment of a MEW MDFZ does not take us anywhere.

3-1. creating an opportunity

To create an arena for multilateral talks and cooperation is essential in resolving problems. This becomes crucial since it provides a place where issues that cross cut many borders and actors can be tackled: moreover, it is extremely important for the parties involved to sit at the same table and notice each other. Besides all the high technology we cherish today, this primitive yet important opportunity can be considered as one of the best ways in creating confidence among countries especially with high suspicion with one another.

- precedent

The Middle East Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group was the only arena for multilateral discussions in the Middle East. This was originally an outcome of the multilateral discussions on the peaceful settlement in the Middle East that took place in Madrid in 1991. It held six plenary sessions before its suspension in 1995, with participations from 15 regional parties, including Israel and Palestine. ACRS has worked mainly on issues regarding confidence-building measures: communication network across region; coordinating search and rescue operations; pre-notifying each other of military activities; establishing regional security centers, to name a few¹⁴. Although ACRS provided a format for direct negotiations, the refusal of Syria, Iran, Iraq and Libya to participate have limited the ability of ACRS to consider regional security issues¹⁵. Certain progress was, in fact, made in the area of confidence building measures: however, the talks were halted indefinitely due to an inability to reconcile basic differences between Israel and Egypt over the nuclear issue¹⁶.

- new option

The Middle East should start seeking possibilities for the creation of a similar initiative, but on a track II level: to name it, the Council for Security Cooperation in the Middle East (CSCoME, which would be pronounced “sis-com”: “sis” as in “sister” and “com” as in “@xxx.com”). Track II initiatives are especially effective in the Middle East, since negotiations among officials tend to fail almost every time, as can be seen from the example of ACRS.

3-2. a role model: the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific

The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP, which is pronounced “sis-cap”) is a non-governmental process for multilateral security dialogue

in the Asia Pacific region. The purpose of CSCAP is to provide a structured process for regional confidence building and security cooperation among countries and territory in the Asia Pacific region¹⁷. With this fundamental purpose, CSCAP holds seven functions¹⁸ and works in six Study Groups¹⁹. The positive effect that CSCAP brings is that since there are multiple issues being discussed in multiple Study Group, stagnation in a certain issues does not suspend talks among countries. To keep connections among each other is the simplest, yet most effective way to sustain confidence and trust. Therefore, from this perspective, the organization of CSCAP is a model that can be thought carefully and put into action.

As the so-called track II initiative, CSCAP seeks to enhance regional security and stability through consultations and cooperation on policy issues and problems of mutual concern. The advantage of CSCAP is that since it is a track II initiative, it may address issues that are too sensitive in official dialogues. Therefore, dialogues that become stagnated in the Asian Regional Forum (ARF), the mother body of CSCAP, may see a way through via dialogues in CSCAP.

What is outstanding in these multinational security dialogues is that members that are keeping a distance from the international community on an official level may actively participate in the conference. Moreover, CSCAP provides an arena for countries with serious cleavages between one another to sit at the same table. This becomes important since the chances of bringing the two parties to a same table, especially on the official level, are quite difficult. Hence, these track II initiatives may likely bring certain breakthroughs, in the long run, for the official levels to start dialogues.

By these actions, positive steps have to be contemplated on official levels for further breakthroughs within the Asia-Pacific region. The problems of North Korea, for example, are widely discussed in these track II initiatives. We are given access to more and more information via these activities to further enhance credibility and security.

3-3. how to get started

- tasks

As seen with CSCAP, issues are not focused only on proliferation matters. Moreover, issues that are not directly linked to security issues may tend to see more progress in these talks. Although CSCoME is a track II initiative, sensitive issues may, at first, be avoided. What is necessary is an accurate selection of topics that would put all the prospective participants on the same table for discussion. This first step will lead us to creating certain confidence among parties, which would ultimately prepare a path for more sensitive talks in the future.

- initiator

One key factor in the progress of multilateral talks in the region would be the presence of an initiator to moderate tensions as well as to direct each participating party to the desirable direction. As history tells us, many have tried to initiate the moves in the Middle East: nonetheless, none have succeeded. As a new step, Japan may be a suitable player in this region. Considering the fact that Japan maintains good relationships with all of the Middle East countries, not only the Arab countries but also Iran and Israel, no hostility would likely to be created when it takes its position. Since the European states are recently tilted to the United States' policy regarding the Middle East, high expectation for them may come short. Japan, with its fair position and a

positive image from the Middle East countries, on the other hand, would be one of the few cards left on the table.

- **funding**

There are, however, several problems that must be countered: first, who would be willing to fund this scheme? When it comes to sensitive security issues, governments are usually reluctant to support funding. While it is important to gain funding from governments, rich Arab as well as Jewish communities are at the same time invited to stand up for the support for this action.

- **support from governments**

Second, with regard to the first problem, the lack of willingness towards the scheme among governments may likely suffocate moves initiated by private sectors. Since most of the policies, even non-official ones, have a tendency of not neglecting governments' positions, chances to promote certain policies against governments may be difficult. It is, therefore, vital to gain positive support, or at least, tacit understandings from governments.

- **members**

Last, but not least, is the problem of membership. Since CSCoME would likely to have multiple issues on the table for discussions, not all states are recommended to participate in every subject. However, discussants from certain states would be required to participate: the selection criteria would be (1) those that are not yet members to WMD related treaties and (2) states that are capable in obtaining WMDs. These countries must participate while others may be based on their own interests.

Conclusion: the way forward

There is a continuing dispute over confidence building vs. the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East region. The Arab-Israeli conflict has, moreover, been impeding the achievement of both these challenges. It is said that trustworthy confidence will not be built unless the Middle East conflict is resolved. Nonetheless, if we wait for the settlement of these conflicts which seems to be worsening nowadays, there would be no prospect of the establishment of a MEWMDFZ.

In order to make a breakthrough from this tragic deadlock, we need to adopt a two-pronged strategy. The first prong is the renewed efforts with stronger political will to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict: the other is intensive measures for confidence building. We need strong human efforts for an ultimate achievement of the two goals: we should not expect any pennies from heaven. Since a long time would be needed for the Middle East to see progress, no time should be wasted: a place for talks must be initiated as soon as possible.

(*)Table: Status of signature and/or ratification of countries that are considered crucial for the establishment of a MEWMDFZ

Country \ Status	Crucial Treaties regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction			
	NPT	CTBT	BWC	CWC
Bahrain	—	—	—	—
Egypt	—	*	—	—
Iran	—	*	—	—
Iraq	—	—	—	—
Israel	—	*	—	—

Jordan	—	—	—	—
Kuwait	—	—	—	—
Lebanon	—	—	—	—
Libya	—	—	—	—
Oman	—	—	—	—
Qatar	—	—	—	—
Saudi Arabia	—	—	—	—
Syria	—	—	—	—
Turkey	—	*	—	—
United Arab Emirates	—	—	—	—
Yemen	—	—	—	—

- ...have ratified, ...have signed but not ratified, ...have not signed
- *...Annex 2 state: ratification required for entry into force

¹ Director, Center for the Promotion of Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, Japan Institute for International Affairs. Also the former Ambassador of Japan to Denmark, Iran and Egypt.

² Doctorate student, University of Tokyo, Graduate Schools for Law and Politics. Also a Research Associate at the Center for the Promotion of Disarmament and Non-Proliferation.

³ For detailed analysis on Nuclear Weapons Free Zones, see Ramash Thakur ed., *Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones*, New York: Macmillan Press, 1988.

⁴ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3263 (XXX). Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free-zone in the region of the Middle East.

⁵ Claudia Baumgart and Harald Muller, “A Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in the Middle East: A Pie in the Sky?” *The Washington Quarterly*, 28-1 (Winter 2004-05), pp45-58.

⁶ For the data regarding the signatory and ratification status of each parties, see the above table (*).

⁷ See United Nations Security Council Resolution 687 (1991).

⁸ See document NPT/CONF.1995/52/RES/1.

⁹ The other three pillars are as follows: Decision [1] Strengthening the Review Process; Decision [2] Principles and Objectives; Decision [3] Indefinite Extension. For more, see Randy Rydell, “The 1995 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review and Extension Conference,” *Arms Control Today*, April 2005, [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2005_04/LookingBack.asp] accessed on September 13 2006. For a complete version of the text of “the Resolution of the Middle East” (NPT/CONF.1995/32 (Part I), Annex), see the following United Nations website:

[<http://disarmament.un.org/wmd/npt/1995RESME.htm>] accessed on September 13 2006. _

¹⁰ According to Rebecca Johnson, free-riders on the NPT regime, such as Israel, derive security benefits from the fact that rivals and neighbors are kept in check by the NPT and its associated instruments. See Rebecca Johnson, “Politics and Protection: why the 2005 NPT Review Conference Failed,” *Disarmament Diplomacy*, Issue No. 80 (Autumn 2005), [<http://www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd80/80npt.htm>] accessed on September 15 2006. _

¹¹ Steven L. Spiegel, Jennifer D. Kibbe and Elizabeth G. Matthews, *The Dynamics of Middle East Nuclear Proliferation*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001, pp.3-5.

¹² Gerald M. Steinberg, “The Obstacles to a Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone,” Ramash Thakur ed., *Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones*, New York: Macmillan Press, p.195-196.

¹³ For example, “1975 United Nations study on nuclear-weapon-free-zones,” 15 countries throughout the gulf region, namely from Libya to Iran were to be included while the northern African countries such as the Republic of Djibouti, the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros, Algeria and Tunisia, as well as Sudan and Somalia were not included. However, in its 1990 report, the UN came to reconsider the definition of the range. It outlined the countries as core states and periphery states; in other words, former referred to countries that were heavily involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict plus Iran: the latter, on the other hand, referred to countries that are highly desired to join in the establishment of the zone, yet it was not a requested to join from the premise initiatives.

¹⁴ Gitty M. Amini, “Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East,” Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute for International Studies, February 2003,

[http://www.nti.org/e_research/e3_24a.html] accessed on September 12 2006.

¹⁵ Steinberg, *op.cit.*, p.195.

¹⁶ Emily Landau, “Israel’s Position on Arms Control and the Nuclear Non-proliferation Regime,” Spiegel, Kibbe and Matthews, *op.cit.*, pp.224-225.

¹⁷ CSCAP Charter, Article II-1. The CSCAP Charter was amended in August 1995.

¹⁸ The seven functions described in the Charter are as follows: (a) to provide an informal mechanism by which political and security issues can be discussed by scholars, officials, and others in their private capacities; (b) to encourage the participants of such individuals from countries and territories in the Asia Pacific on the basis of the principle of inclusiveness; (c) to organize various working group to address security issues and challenges facing the region; (d) to provide policy recommendations to various intergovernmental bodies on political-security issues; (e) to convene regional and international meetings and other cooperative activities for the purpose of discussing political security issues; (f) to establish linkages with institutions and organization in other parts of the world to exchange information, insights and experiences in the area of regional political-security cooperation; and (g) to produce and disseminate publications relevant to the other purposes of the organization

¹⁹ The six Study Groups are as follows: 1. Capacity-building for Maritime Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific; 2. Countering the Proliferation of WMD in the Asia Pacific; 3. Future Prospects for Multilateral Security Frameworks in North Asia; 4. Human Trafficking; 5. Regional Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding; and, 6. Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Campaign Against International Terrorism with Specific Reference to the Asia Pacific Region.