



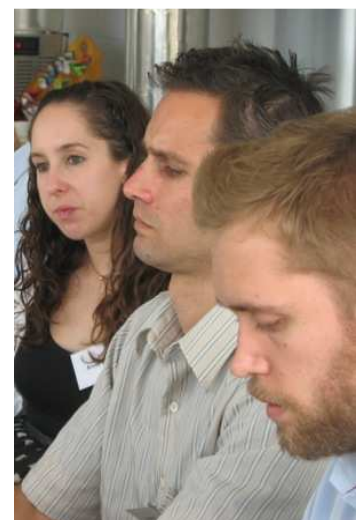
## **Pugwash Workshop Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East**

### **REPORT**

20-21 May 2011, Tel Aviv, Israel

#### **MAIN POINTS**

- Uncertainty is the main result of the ‘Arab Spring’ thus far; some of the old dynamics, such as competition for regional hegemony, are likely to remain in any case;
- US policy toward regional developments is unclear and inconsistent, yet the US remains the only serious actor capable of asserting influence in the Middle East;
- The 2012 conference on a zone free of nuclear weapons or WMD in the Middle East is looking ever more uncertain; however, the current climate could prove a great opportunity to move ahead with the Arab-Israeli conflict – an ACRS-style multi-track process could build a new culture of dialogue;
- There are a number of intermediate steps Israel could consider that would engender a positive atmosphere in the region and strengthen the non-proliferation regime.



## REPORT

On 20-21 May 2011, Pugwash convened a workshop in Tel Aviv, Israel, on “Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East.” Organized in cooperation with Tel Aviv University's Center for Iranian Studies and Israeli Pugwash, this 5<sup>th</sup> annual meeting engaged approximately 30 current and former policy makers and experts in dialogue on regional security issues and weapons of mass destruction.<sup>1</sup> Topics addressed include:

1. Developments in the Arab world and the implications for the region and international order;
2. Perceptions of the ‘Arab Spring’ for Israel and perceived consequences for its security;
3. Israeli opinions on Iran and its nuclear program and the ways of addressing these concerns (including possible linkages to Palestine, Syria and the larger Middle East);
4. Broader issues of WMD in the Middle East.

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. However, a large majority of the participants was from Israel, and this is reflected in the views contained in this report. This report is a summary of the topics discussed, prepared by the rapporteur<sup>2</sup>, who has sole responsibility for its contents.

Pugwash would like to thank the supporters that make this and related meetings possible. In particular, we would like to thank the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Carnegie Corporation and the Israeli Academy of Sciences for their support of this workshop.



*Sverre Lodgaard (Norway, left) and  
Ambassador Nikolai von Schoepff (Germany)*

### **Comments on the Arab Spring – Changes and Continuity**

The general impression was that the turmoil in the Middle East beginning in January 2011 caught most people unaware. To a large extent, administrations, regional leaders, commentators, and academics were surprised by how quickly events developed in different countries across the region. However, there were varying interpretations of the causes of the various uprisings; of course, different countries were subject to different factors. In Egypt for example, there was speculation among the group that economic concerns may not have been the

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<sup>1</sup> Other recent Pugwash publications in this area include: the Working Group report on ‘Prospects for Peace and Security in the Middle East’ from the Pugwash Conference in Berlin, July 2011, [http://www.pugwash.org/reports/pic/59/59\\_documents/WG2\\_Report\\_final.pdf](http://www.pugwash.org/reports/pic/59/59_documents/WG2_Report_final.pdf); the Farnham Castle meeting of October 2010, [http://www.pugwash.org/reports/nw/Task\\_Ahead/Farnham\\_Report.htm](http://www.pugwash.org/reports/nw/Task_Ahead/Farnham_Report.htm); and the report from Pugwash consultations on the Middle East held during the NPT Review Conference of May 2010, [http://www.pugwash.org/reports/nw/NPT-Review-Conference-May-2010/Pugwash\\_Consultation-May15.htm](http://www.pugwash.org/reports/nw/NPT-Review-Conference-May-2010/Pugwash_Consultation-May15.htm).

<sup>2</sup> The rapporteur for this report was Poul-Erik Christiansen, Projects Assistant, 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 rapporteur, nor of the Pugwash Conferences as an organization.

primary driver, witnessed by the fact that among the leaders out in the streets were the wealthier middle-classes calling for an end to Hosni Mubarak's regime. In Tunisia, on the other hand, the main contributing factor was seen to be socio-economic pressures leading to wider dissatisfaction with the ruling elite and its ideology.

Egypt was readily identified as the most important case thus far. One trend of opinion within the group saw the movement starting with an apparently democratic motivation by educated young people not feeling represented, using new media to create a bottom-up movement, rather than action by the established political parties – the prevailing discourse has been focussed on the down-to-earth realities of freedom, democracy, justice, and equality. On the other hand, while acknowledging the role of the youth, a competing analysis interpreted the dissatisfaction as being motivated by Mubarak's regional foreign policy, particularly in relation to Israel-Palestine issues (Egypt's decision to support the Gaza blockade was cited as a key example).

Among the group, it was suggested that although people power and large uprisings within various communities had de-stabilised many regimes, these popular movements had no clear direction or agenda other than the immediate goal of toppling the status quo. It was pointed out by a number of participants that the Islamist political movements might not have been a serious driver of the revolution in the region. Indeed, one participant claimed that the young Arabs recognise that previous attempts of building Islamic states in Afghanistan, Iran, and Sudan are not good role models. This could explain why Al Qaradawi was not widely supported in Cairo. However, most participants felt that was not the beginning of the end of the Islamist movements – for example, the Muslim Brotherhood is still very much alive in Egypt, and may benefit in future polls from the March referendum, won by people seeking immediate change rather than a longer-term reform process.

Concerns over a radical Islamist outcome were tempered by one participant, noting that the Muslim Brotherhood has already evolved from its more radical principles and the possibility of further evolution was a realistic perspective. Having seen Nasser's Arab socialism being replaced by capitalism, which then regressed to cronyism, it was observed that there are not many political ideologies available to Arabs – pan-Arabism or Islamism – and that these present the most obvious alternatives to the vast majority of the population, particularly where education is at low levels and Islam is the basic form of communal organisation. It was argued that 30 years ago Islam was seen as the solution, but that is not the same answer now unless it is a different idea of Islam. It remains a powerful element in the soul of people but it holds limited translation into a political force. However, the group was reminded that initially even the Iranian Islamic revolution had moderates as its face.

Despite the tumultuous changes, a further observation was that there has been one significant element of commonality: while dictators were suffering in the revolutions, the monarchies of the Middle East remain relatively stable. This could be attributed to the differing internal dynamics, with traditional tribal structures supporting the quasi-religious legitimacy of monarchs. Yet, it was agreed that the model of two competing regional blocs along these lines, moderates and extremists (or better, status quo and revisionist) was no longer a relevant paradigm. The lines are being blurred as it is increasingly hard to compartmentalise each actor – do Hamas,



*Ambassador Jeremy Issacharoff (Israel, right) with Helit Barel (Israel, centre) and Merav Zafary (Israel)*

Hizbollah, Syria and Iran continue to play the “extremist” role?; and how to categorise Egypt? Despite this, it was acknowledged that some old dynamics would in any case remain, namely competition for regional hegemony.

In this respect, two countries were widely identified as pivotal: Bahrain and Syria. Real change in either of these countries could have repercussions well beyond their own borders but more specifically, they are seen by some as key conduits of Iran’s pretensions for regional hegemony. Bahrain was offered as a ‘litmus test’ by one participant, reflecting the Sunni/Shi’a divide and the contrasting support from Saudi Arabia and Iran which could go on to exacerbate conditions in Lebanon and Syria. However, it was argued that if that was the case, the test was over: it appears that Iran’s aspirations to influence events there have failed, with the GCC group asserting their dominance. At the time of the meeting, it was considered impossible to predict the outcome in Syria. However, it was observed that Syria was the major nexus for Iran, without which Iran would be more isolated. There would be also ramifications for Lebanon, Turkey, and of course Israel, should the Assad regime fall.

### **Global and Regional Reactions**

One participant raised the question of what the actual capabilities of the global order are to deal with the trend of democracy spreading through the Middle East. It appeared that initial reactions by states were kneejerk on the whole, some driven by interest and others by values or ideas, some successful and some not. However, it was agreed that the varying actions of external players were predominately based on interest balanced by capabilities, such that intervention in Libya would not necessarily be followed by interventions elsewhere. As a general trend, the participants perceived the engagement of external players as rather low and inconsistent. Notwithstanding NATO involvement in Libya, the EU has been unable to formulate a common position; Russia has been quiet yet the actions it has taken (such as arms sales to Syria) have important immediate ramifications regionally which need to be considered; China has not acted at all (apart from internal suppression of media following the events); and the other BRICS countries (Brazil, India, South Africa) very reticent considering their standing among the emerging world order. Participants were reminded that these states were simply behaving according to their duties of non-interference under the UN Charter.

For one participant, the sequence of events left an interesting paradox: although US influence in the Middle East was thought to be waning it is still the only player to have sufficient ability to act, reflecting the continuing unipolarity of world power. Despite the EU/NATO seemingly dragging the US towards action in Libya, it is now mainly the US shouldering the burden (some 96% of the share by one reckoning).



*Emily Landau (Israel) and  
Matthew Duss (USA)*

The meeting took place one day after President Obama’s speech on the Middle East, which was received cautiously; while the sentiments expressed by the President were generally ‘what people wanted to hear’, there was a feeling that he (and the US) would be constrained in delivering the aims set out. The participants reflected on the fact that, despite being in the eye of the storm, the US had no clear and definable policy across the board - it continued to follow a path of selective prioritisation, in rhetorical terms condemning Iran and Syria for forceful repression yet turning a blind eye to events in the GCC area, where mass bribes or use of force were deemed to have quelled any uprising. It was

noted that this gave an impression to those demonstrating in Syria, for example, of how many would have to be killed before action there is taken?

Looking to the future, it was asked whether the world order would be able to pro-act, or continue to 'sit on the balcony' on a path of mixed responses. Similarly, there was a general recognition that a new regional order would emerge, less reliant on the old blocs and more focused on individual actors. Five key states were identified: Egypt, Iran, Israel, Turkey, and the GCC grouping (led in most part by Saudi Arabia), with a configuration of power based on these relationships.



*Liora Hendelman-Baavur  
(Israel, left) and David Menashri  
(Israel)*

### **The impact of regional developments on Israel**

Some of the participants considered that the Israeli Government greeted the Arab Spring as a threat, sensing a rise of instability and Iran benefitting from the upheavals. For example, if popular will determines future policy this could well see the anti-Israel platform grow with regional governments less committed to the peace process. However, it was recognised that one should be open-minded as positive opportunities may arrive. In the way that Israel has been very silent, inaction may have been a great action.

The case of Egypt was labelled as critical for Israel as uncertainty in the relationship, which has been the cornerstone of strategic reality for decades, would change many calculations for policy-makers. Egypt brokered the reconciliation of Fatah and Hamas: one interpretation was that this could be the end of the peace process, as how can Israel make peace with Hamas? The other more positively spoke of being able to domesticate Hamas, which showed a certain weakness in being coaxed into this.

With respect to events in Syria, one participant considered President Assad to be in a dictator's dilemma: using a great deal of force risks turning the army against him, but too little force may lead to regime change. The problem then becomes who controls Damascus and the conventional and unconventional capabilities they possess. To assume that Israel would want to 'deal with the devil they know' is not necessarily correct – Israel still has major problems with the Assad regime so this policy prescription may not hold water in Jerusalem.

The most important case was considered to be Iran. Their activities across the board remain the centre of focus for Israel but, as they have been taken off the front-burner internationally, there was real concern this could lead to a nuclear Iran. Recently they have benefitted from high oil prices and avoided greater sanctions; in addition to the reduction in Western leverage Iran remains a challenge to the moderate Arab countries. In terms of the Iranian anti-Israeli rhetoric, one participant felt that actually there was little public participation but rather it was used as a domestic tool which is still politically rewarding. Further, even Turkey has a similar philosophy, that an important element of regional leadership is distance from Israel. The impression, therefore, is that if Iran were put into a framework of dialogue it would weaken them as they lose their victim status.

Generally it was felt that for Israel, the Middle East is becoming much more complicated. There will be more regional players that are acting more assertively (and potentially more populist) than they

used to. It was suggested this could leave Israel with a dilemma – despite the existence of peace with Egypt and Jordan, changes affect the military build-up and strategic resourcing. Where there are early warnings this could mean changing priorities and capabilities, but should Israel act now? In reaction, one participant cited two schools of thought: the dominant discourse prescribes that in times of turmoil, don't take risks; pursue a policy of cautious inaction (which still has its own implications of course). On the other hand, a time of crisis could strongly motivate Israel to do more to reduce friction with the Arab world. Potentially the greatest threat to Israel is a loss of legitimacy globally, and so one participant felt it was time to change the paradigm: the recognition is that a two state solution is essential but peace is impossible in the near future, so consider the possibility of a two state solution without peace.

### **The impact of regional developments on Iran**

One participant reported that on 16 January 2011 there was a call to support the Arab spring by the 'green movement' within Iran, but permission for a show of solidarity was rejected by government, that six days later was arresting dissenters. There was speculation among the group that in Iran they may have initially viewed the Arab spring as an imitation of 1979, but it seemed more obvious, rather, that it was an imitation of events in Iran in 2009. It was proposed that many of the young supporters of Iran's 'Green Revolution' must now look on enviously as Arabs manage to accomplish comparatively quickly what they have been aiming for over two years. The Iranian regime, however, was viewed by some participants to be behaving in a very similar way to the US, taking a case-by-case approach and no coherent policy or attitude toward general events. The most important connection was considered to be between the Syrian regime and Iran, with the inference that there is considerable concern over events in Syria. The Hamas-Fatah agreement reduces the influence of Iran in Gaza and a destabilisation of the Assad regime was considered to weaken Iran's hand with Hizbollah.

Participants discussed what they saw as internal power struggles within Iran. There were questions over the succession by the Supreme Leader's son Mojtaba, which was perceived to have been abandoned due to the decreasing legitimacy of hereditary leadership. Some participants believed there has been a clandestine military takeover of many sectors of the country by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRGC). Former members have been placed in government, elected to the Majlis, and are taking an ever more influential hold on the economy (such as buying former government industry sold off to the 'private sector' and gaining leverage and patronage through various jobs). Yet many



*Ambassador Svein Sevje (Norway)*

participants identified a narrowing support for the regime as an important trend, exemplified by ongoing disputes between the Supreme Leader and President Ahmadinejad. However, it was also pointed out that we have very little reliable data in the form of polls, for example, reflecting who is in support of what, therefore outside of Iran we have no idea of the realities on the ground (one participant likened this process of speculation to the Kremlinologists of the Cold War).

There was a feeling among some participants that Iran, while not necessarily benefitting directly from the Arab Spring, has been able to use events to divert attention from their nuclear programme. There was serious concern expressed that behind the rhetoric of pursuing a civil nuclear energy programme there was a concerted effort to forge ahead with a covert military

nuclear option. One participant felt that the Israelis had more important things to worry about than Iran and that the continuing focus upon Iran served only to boost their stature on the world stage. However, there was also a feeling expressed by some that Israel could still pursue a course of action, military or otherwise, to prevent any latent nuclear weapons programme from developing and that there is still debate within Israel about how to proceed due to a perceived inability of the international community to act.



*Aharon Zohar (Israel, right) and Meir Litvak (Israel)*

### **WMD in the Middle East**

Following the 2010 NPT Review Conference, in line with commitments under the 1995 NPT Resolution on the Middle East, a meeting in 2012 was called for to be held under the auspices of the UN Secretary General and the three NPT Depositary States (US, Russia, and the UK) to discuss the creation of a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East. Participants felt that little positive action had been taken in the subsequent year and that following the Arab Spring this meeting is shrouded in even more uncertainty. However, some participants felt that inaction would be greatly detrimental to the overall process and the meeting should take place – the key is defining appropriate goals, one of which could simply be discussing suggestions for processes in the future.

There was some scepticism that the concept of a WMD Free Zone should be pursued under the NPT framework at all, although there was acknowledgement that broadly speaking many states have accepted the strong linkage between nuclear and other WMD in formal positions. However, in recognising the relationship of WMD and security, there was general agreement that incremental steps should be taken to decrease the salience of WMD in the region.

Some of the participants felt it was unrealistic to expect Israel to either lift the veil of opacity or join the NPT and even ratify the other relevant treaties (the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention) because of the sheer complexity of the security environment. Further, calls by many states for this to happen were considered unhelpful to the strategic environment as Israel can actually continue to support the aims of the NPT without signing. Therefore, some participants proposed a set of intermediary steps that Israel should positively consider to strengthen the regime:

- A unilateral declaration of no first use (NFU) or as part of an initiative for regional NFU (it was stressed that a NFU policy can be signed by all states of the region without implying possession of any WMD);
- Ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty could unlock other regional issues with other states (ratifying the CTBT would also have positive global effects);
- If a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty can happen then Israel should think positively about joining and supporting this measure.

There was discussion over the relationship of the peace process and arms control (both conventional and WMD): many participants pointed to the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) talks as a model process which embraced a step-by-step logic in a positive manner. There was a feeling that as a point of departure one can define common interests, discuss threat perceptions and the use of CSBMs, rather than start with the hard



*Paolo Cotta-Ramusino (Italy)  
Avishay Braverman MK (Israel)*

issues (WMD) straight off. Despite perceptions that entering negotiations with the problematic precondition of transparency of nuclear weapons and other WMD (it was pointed out that many regional states have ‘cheated’ on international obligations) participants were reminded that all arms control negotiations presuppose exchange of information and that this is a function of arms control processes. Emphasis should be placed on building a culture of dialogue: a new ACRS-style process, with several sub-processes including the many conventional weapons and of course WMD, could be initiated at a Madrid-like conference, taking the Arab Peace Initiative as the most suitable building block for the dialogue.

## **Participant List**

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**Gen. (ret.) Shlomo Brom**, Senior Research Fellow and Director, Program on Israel-Palestinian Relations at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). [Formerly, Deputy for Security Policy of the National Security Advisor (in the National Security Council; Director of Strategic Planning in the Planning Branch of the IDF GHQ]

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**Brandon Friedman**, Center for Iranian Studies, Tel Aviv University.

**Prof. Galia Golan-Gild** PhD, Professor of Government, Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel; Professor Emerita, Department of Political Science, Hebrew University of Jerusalem [formerly: Darwin Professor of Soviet and East European Studies; Chair, Department of Political Science, Hebrew University of Jerusalem].

**Mr. Efraim Halevi**, Former Director of Mossad, Tel Aviv, Israel.

**Dr. Liora Hendelman-Baavur**, Center for Iranian Studies, Tel Aviv University.

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**Dr. Emily Landau**, Senior Research Associate at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS).

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**Mr. Sverre Lodgaard**, Senior Research Fellow, Norwegian Institute for International Affairs, Norway.

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