



**Towards the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)**

**Thematic Seminar on Pillar II: non-proliferation**

**Regional Issues**

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Mr. Chairman, I want to congratulate Amb. Zlauvinen for his election as President-designate and Amb. Bugajski on your election as Chair-designate of Main Committee II. And thank the EU for convening this important event.

UNIDIR launched in Sep 2019 a three-year project on the ME-WMDFZ generously funded by the EU.

The project has 4 overarching objectives:

- The first project objective is research: we seek to fill an important research gap on how the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (ME WMDFZ) issue has evolved.
  - The Zone existed as early as the late-1950s as an idea and since 1974 in multilateral fora.
  - While we will study the history of the Zone in its entirety, we will mainly focus on the period from 1990 to the present, with special emphasis on Zone-relevant historical episodes that are under-documented, like the informal consultations from 2010 to 2015. But we also look at major events throughout the Zone history such as the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) process in the 1990s, the adoption of the decision to convene a ME-WMDFZ conference at the 2010 NPT RevCon, and the Glion and Geneva 2013-2014 consultations.
  - We are also looking on issues that are relevant for today's Middle East that were not present when the idea of the Zone emerged in the 1970s such as the increased interests of nuclear energy in the region, CW use, the spread of conventional and

non-conventional weapons in the region, all complicate the materialization of the zone today.

- The risk of not documenting these critical historical processes, while the actors who participated in these events are still around and remember important facts, details, and lessons for future efforts, is that this history will be lost and mistakes repeat.
  - We are also in the process of creating an online interactive chronology of the Zone, that will be used also as a depository of historical documents, including international organizations, governmental documents and personal papers that are not publicly available; so far we have collected over 150 documents
- The second objective is to collect ideas and develop new proposals on how to move forward on the Zone.
    - Through inclusive engagement we aim to obtain perspectives and insights from a wide community of policymakers, researchers, and academics in the region and beyond
    - By doing so, we want to expand the number and diversity of participants exploring the prospects for dialogue and progress on the longstanding issue in the context of wider regional WMD and security contemporary issues as well as other experiences of regional nuclear free zones.
  - The third component is capacity building. We work to build analytic capacity to support new thinking on the zone and regional security issues.
    - We do so by exploring consistent, emerging, or forgotten themes and ideas related to the Zone issue.
    - We will also engage on legal, technical and thematic issues as relevant to build the capacity and knowledge on the relevant topics.
  - The fourth objective is to facilitate inclusive dialogue This is done on specific ideas and initiatives to enhance regional security and the management of WMD threats in the Middle East among countries in the region and their external partners;
    - Through building a region-wide and global network of experts on the Zone and related issue and fostering communication and engagement between its members;
    - By doing so, this project will build the foundations for thinking, dialogue and negotiations;
    - Specifically, we will offer a discreet framework to examine a broad range of the relevant issues, explore and develop fresh perspectives that may offer avenues for future progress; support and contribute to a conducive environment for potential future dialogue.

- We are conducting visits to the key countries of the region to speak with the WMD arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation communities there about their perceptions of the ongoing Zone effort and regional security situation and how to best approach both;
  - Egypt was our first national visit as the most important country in the Zone debate
  - We plan visits to Iran and Israel in the next months, and sub-regional events in Jordan and the Gulf
  - We plan regional events that will bring these different communities together for a dialogue on important Zone and regional-security related questions
  - Finally we plan events and side events at important venues like the NPT RevCon

How is this project different from previous research projects on the ME WMDFZ?

- 03 years project: Commitment, depth and length that allow us to explore issues comprehensively, build network of experts and officials, and engages states in the region
- Holistic approach: Tackling all the components of research, capacity building, dialogue and topics and themes.
- UNIDIR umbrella: Part of the United Nations yet still independent reliable, trusted and impartial body. The project will be transparent, and the publications, chronology and other products produce will be available for member states, experts and the public.
- Team from the region: represent various regional countries, diverse background (official and academic), diverse experiences as related to the zone (Dr. Zak started during ACRS years; Wael Al Assad was closely involved in the negotiations since 2010) and diverse age and gender perspectives

Through our interviews, country visit and workshops we conducted so far, below are several insights we managed to draw already that hopefully can inform the upcoming NPT RevCon:

- Proliferation challenges in the Middle East have been a prominent feature in every NPT Review cycle since 1995. This is a trend that is likely to continue.
- The constructive deliberations and positive conclusion of the first session of the Conference on the ME-WMDFZ in November 2019 could have a positive impact by relieving some of the pressure seen in previous NPT review cycles around the ME WMDFZ issue and contribute to constructive dialogue in the upcoming 2020 NPT Review Conference.

- On the 50th anniversary of the NPT, both international and regional developments (such as the ongoing civil wars and unrest in the region, the deterioration of compliance of the JCPOA, CW use, proliferation of conventional weapons and means of delivery, and the dual use nature of nuclear energy) further complicate the achievability of a ME WMDFZ. On balance, the situation is more complex and therefore a zone is harder to achieve than when the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East was adopted 25 years ago.
- Grievances and frustrations at the outcome of past processes must be acknowledged, and so fundamentally divergent objectives and national security interests, mistrust, ongoing conflicts, in order to understand the current state of the process, current prospects and identify achievable next steps.
- It is important to examine in more concrete terms how the idea of the ME WMDFZ can be implemented and operationalized.
- In that context, there are important lessons-to-be-learned for progress from the experiences of other similar processes. These lessons included experiences from ACRS, the 2010 NPT RevCon, the Glion and Geneva consultations, the JCPOA, as well as other NWFZs and regional tailored nuclear verification regimes such as EURATOM and ABACC. One of the conclusions, we identified is that the importance of a supportive international environment as well as cooperation between Russia and the US as necessary (but insufficient) factors to gain regional momentum on the Zone.
- Key regional players must have a shared interest, not just on the ultimate goal, but also on how to get there.
- Participation of key states is essential. A serious discussion cannot be conducted about a ME WMDFZ without key players.
- We also identified that there are divergent views in the region for the causes of WMD proliferation (rivalry, and mistrust or power imbalance), and as a result, what will be the best policies to address these.
- There is also divergent in views whether to pursue the ME WMDFZ comprehensively or through gradual measures as the more promising route for a successful outcome.
- There are many Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) which could help to address the mistrust among the key stakeholders and their regional security concerns. These can support the ME WMDFZ process, prior to its establishment, throughout its implementation as well as in parallel processes.