

# MIDDLE EAST WMD-FREE ZONE PROJECT

## FINAL REPORT

By Tomisha Bino and Chen Zak Kane



MIDDLE EAST WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION FREE ZONE SERIES



## **ABOUT UNIDIR**

UNIDIR is a voluntarily funded, autonomous institute within the United Nations. One of the few policy institutes worldwide focusing on disarmament, UNIDIR generates knowledge and promotes dialogue and action on disarmament and security. Based in Geneva, UNIDIR assists the international community to develop the practical, innovative ideas needed to find solutions to critical security problems.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	5
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	7
<b>1 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT</b>	9
1.1 The Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction	9
1.2 The COVID-19 pandemic	10
<b>2 OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS</b>	11
Objective 1: Filling the research gap on the evolution of the ME WMDFZ process	11
Objective 2: Building regional capacity	14
Objective 3: Collating new ideas and proposals on the way forward	17
Objective 4: Fostering dialogue among experts and policymakers in the Middle East	18
<b>3 PROJECT KEY TAKEAWAYS</b>	20
3.1. Factors with an impact on progress towards the establishment of the Zone	20
3.1.1. Changing and complex regional political and security dynamics	21
3.1.2. Geopolitical tensions	21
3.1.3. The potential developmental and cooperation benefits of a Zone are insufficient	22
3.2. Lessons learned from the ME WMDFZ and related processes	22
3.2.1. The importance of documenting processes	23
3.2.2. The impact of the composition of negotiation teams	23
3.2.3. Agreeing on objectives and modalities from the outset	24
3.2.4. Defining the role of and expectations of extraregional parties involved in the process	24
3.2.5. Price of a failed process	25
3.3. Importance of sustained and focused dialogue	25
3.3.1. The value of national and subregional dialogue	25
3.3.2. Strengthening national and regional support structures for a ME WMDFZ	26
<b>4 CONCLUSION</b>	28
<b>Annex 1</b> Project publications and events	29
<b>Annex 2</b> Project publications – findings and recommendations	32
<b>Annex 3</b> Engagement metrics	37

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The urgency of establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East has never been more apparent, yet its achievement remains distant. Very little progress has been made so far despite many resolutions in international forums and the broad international and regional support for its establishment. The long-standing divisions among regional states regarding the issue of a Middle East WMD-Free Zone (ME WMDFZ) have been combined with deep-seated rivalries and a lack of trust among states. These have led to a decline in attention to, interest in and research on collaborative initiatives to mitigate proliferation challenges in the Middle East and achieve progress on a ME WMDFZ. As progress remains elusive, the escalating risks associated with known and suspected WMD programmes only heighten the likelihood of further proliferation, conflict and instability within the region and beyond its borders.

Against this challenging background and with the support of the European Union, in August 2019, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) launched a project to examine the past, perspectives and prospects for a ME WMDFZ. The project is unique in its comprehensiveness and its holistic approach. These were manifested in the project's four objectives:

- Filling important research gaps related to how the issue of a ME WMDFZ has evolved over time, including lessons for current activities and future prospects.
- Building analytic capacity to support new thinking on regional security issues and a Zone, including drawing on lessons from the establishment of other nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZ).

- Collecting ideas and developing new proposals on how to move forward on this issue.
- Fostering inclusive dialogue among experts and policymakers on regional security issues and the Zone, which in turn could contribute to ongoing multilateral and regional processes.

The project benefitted from the support, guidance and advice of a Reference Group, which included high-level current and former officials from Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, the European Union, the Russia Federation, the United Nations, and the United States. Members of the Reference Group, which convened annually, also assisted the project by facilitating national and subregional workshops and by introducing the project and its staff members to key individuals and organizations in the region. Lastly, the UNIDIR project team was exclusively comprised of researchers from the Middle East, reflecting the intention to anchor the project in the region and to build on and build up local capacity.

To achieve the above objectives, the ME WMDFZ Project organized 23 events, published 15 reports (including 2 online tools) and a quarterly newsletter, and contributed to over 57 external events. Maximum efforts were made throughout the implementation of the project to access and gather information from and consult with all relevant countries in the region and players in the various past and ongoing Zone processes.

The project had an impact on several fronts. First, it gained the trust and cooperation of regional and international interlocutors. This was demonstrated by the many requests for capacity-building training and assistance, to which the project responded to the extent possible. These capacity-building activities helped strengthen knowledge and skills among officials and experts involved in ME WMDFZ efforts, including diplomats, experts and students. By equipping them with the necessary diplomatic, technical and legal tools and expertise, the project contributed to informed research and policymaking, which enabled these key stakeholders to make better-informed decisions and recommendations.

Furthermore, the project provided support in drafting reports, summarizing state positions and bridging gaps during regional conferences. This assistance played a crucial role in facilitating productive discussions and negotiations and fostering a more inclusive and collaborative environment for dialogue. By integrating new voices, topics and ideas into the ME WMDFZ negotiations, academic research and policy discourse, the project also helped to broaden perspectives and enrich the overall understanding of the ME WMDFZ issue.

Overall, the project's impact can be observed through its concrete contributions to capacity-building, research and policy formulation and the feedback received from regional and international interlocutors. By empowering individuals, informing decision-making processes and promoting inclusive dialogue, the project has played an important role in advancing the cause of establishing a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East.

# INTRODUCTION

In the face of escalating risks associated with existing and suspected WMD programmes, the urgent need for a ME WMDFZ has become increasingly apparent. However, deep-seated rivalries, disagreements over objectives and priorities, and a lack of trust among regional actors have hindered progress and diverted attention away from collaborative initiatives to mitigate regional proliferation challenges.

In response to these pressing concerns, UNIDIR, with the support of the European Union, initiated a three-year project in August 2019 to examine the past, perspectives and prospects for a ME WMDFZ. This project is distinguished by its holistic approach and by its four comprehensive objectives:

1. Filling the research gap on the evolution of the ME WMDFZ process
2. Building regional capacity
3. Collating new ideas and proposals on the way forward
4. Fostering dialogue among experts and policymakers in the Middle East

In addition, the project team comprised researchers exclusively from the region, reflecting a commitment to building local capacity and anchoring the project within the region. A Reference Group was established to advise and support the project. The Reference Group, which convened annually, included high-level officials – both current and former – from Egypt, Iran, Israel, the EU, Russia, the United Nations, and the United States. Members of the Reference Group assisted the project in its initial stage by facilitating national and subregional workshops and by introducing the project and its staff members to key individuals and organizations in the region.

Throughout its implementation, the ME WMDFZ Project organized 23 events, published 15 reports and contributed to 57 external events (see Annex 1), all aimed at accessing information, gathering insights, promoting dialogue, building capacity and consulting with relevant regional stakeholders.

This final report of the project is organized into three sections. Section 1 provides an overview of changes in the regional and international environments that took place during implementation of the project that had an impact on its objectives and influenced the way it was implemented. Section 2 delves into the project's goals, activities, and outcomes. It outlines the objectives set at the outset and details the activities undertaken to achieve them. It also presents a comprehensive overview of the outputs generated by the project. By comprehensively presenting the project's objectives, activities and outputs, this section aims to provide a clear understanding of its progress and outcomes. Section 3 synthesizes the main insights and lessons learned from the project. These takeaways are derived exclusively from the outcomes of the project's activities, publications, and dialogues. They are not prescriptive recommendations provided by the project team or its Reference Group; instead, they should be seen as observations arising from the findings and as insights gained through the project's implementation. The report also includes three annexes. Annex 1 outlines a list of the project's activities – its events and publications. Annex 2 provides a short overview of the objectives, findings and main takeaways of each publication. Annex 3 presents statistics about the project's outputs and outreach.

# SECTION 1

## PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

The ME WMDFZ Project had to contend with and adapt to several changes in both the regional and the international environments. These changes had an impact on the content of the project's objectives and influenced the execution of its activities and initiatives.

### 1.1 The Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction

The UNIDIR project was developed before the United Nations General Assembly adopted a decision in December 2018 to convene an annual Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction.<sup>1</sup> As the implementation of the project began concurrently with the commencement of a formal Track 1 process, UNIDIR had to consider the political, logistical and substantive implications of the Conference for the project's activities and implementation.

To address this diplomatic development, the project took proactive measures to gain the support of and collaboration with Middle Eastern states, including by demonstrating that the project was not intended to undermine the formal process. On the advice of its Reference Group, the project started by organizing national-level workshops in Egypt, Iran, and Israel, along with a subregional meeting in Bahrain for the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), before convening region-wide events. These workshops were essential for familiarizing regional stakeholders with the project's objectives and securing their trust and support. In order to preserve open and unrestricted discussion, these national and subregional workshops were not subject to public reports.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly, "Convening a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction", Decision 73/546, 22 December 2018, <https://unidir.org/node/5664>.

The content of the workshops served as valuable resources that informed the project's further activities.

The project had to assess how to achieve its objectives while Track 1 talks continued through the UN General Assembly (UNGA)-ME WMDFZ mandated process. The project identified two approaches that could contribute to the Zone initiative: convening Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues;<sup>2</sup> and conducting capacity-building activities (for details on the implementation of these activities, see section 2 and the annexes).

Beyond the opening and closing sessions of the UNGA-mandated ME WMDFZ Conference, the participating states restricted attendance to only states from the region, the five nuclear weapons states and the three international organizations named in the 2018 General Assembly Decision (the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit). This restriction also covered meetings of the Conference's intercessional body, the Working Committee. However, in line with the established practice of UNIDIR providing support to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, a UNIDIR staff member was subsequently invited to assist the Conference's Secretariat.

## 1.2. The COVID-19 pandemic

In response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project had to adapt its implementation plan to account for the travel restrictions that were put in place. To continue its efforts to promote dialogue, the project shifted its focus to virtual discussions and research initiatives. This included organizing online workshops and events to facilitate communication and collaboration between stakeholders. Among these were virtual national-level workshops in Iran and Israel, a virtual round table on cooperation related to nuclear research and energy, and a round table addressing chemical and biological weapons in the context of a ME WMDFZ.

Some research activities were also remodelled to include dialogue and capacity-building components. For example, as part of the publishing of a report, UNIDIR convened a virtual round table with the author, regional and international experts, and diplomats to discuss the report's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The collected feedback from the round table contributed to the final drafting of the project's publication.

Although the pandemic created challenges for the project, the shift to virtual events also provided certain advantages. For instance, virtual events allowed for broader and more diverse audiences, and they also secured the participation of speakers from more countries who might not have been able to travel for in-person events.

<sup>2</sup> Track 1.5 combines official government-level (Track 1) diplomacy with unofficial, non-governmental (Track 2) diplomacy. It involves semi-official or unofficial dialogues that include both governmental and non-governmental actors. Track 2 involves interactions only among unofficial, non-governmental actors. Both are aimed at fostering discussions and innovative solutions to complement official negotiations.

## SECTION 2

# OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

To achieve the project's objectives, UNIDIR organised 23 events, published 15 reports (including 2 online tools) and a quarterly newsletter, and contributed to over 57 external events. These activities and outputs are summarized below as they relate to the four objectives: filling important research gaps related to how the issue of the ME WMDFZ has evolved over time, including lessons for current processes and future prospects; building analytic capacity to support new thinking on regional security issues and a Zone, including drawing on lessons from the establishment of other regional NWFZ; collecting ideas and develop new proposals on how to move forwards on this issue, and fostering inclusive dialogue among experts and policymakers on regional security issues and a Zone, which in turn could contribute to ongoing multilateral processes (see table 1).

### OBJECTIVE 1

#### **FILLING THE RESEARCH GAP ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE ME WMDFZ PROCESS**

The proposal to establish a ME WMDFZ has a long history, spanning over 60 years, and has been the subject of numerous resolutions, initiatives, meetings, and studies. Although there is a substantial body of research on the origins of this process, accessing most of the documents is not straightforward, with some remaining unpublished. Furthermore, earlier research focused on the period from 1974 to 2010, but significant developments since 2010 have been poorly documented and have received little attention. This has resulted in generally limited documentation of crucial milestones related to the Zone process,

**Table 1:** List of activities and corresponding project objectives

Workstreams	Objective 1 Filling important research gaps on the evolution of the ME WMDFZ	Objective 2 Building regional capacity	Objective 3 Collating new ideas and proposals for the way forward	Objective 4 Fostering dialogue among experts and policymakers in the Middle East
Pathways forward to the NPT RevCon			✓	✓
NWFZs contribution to regional security	✓	✓		
Documents depository	✓			
Nuclear verification		✓		✓
Lessons from the JCPOA		✓	✓	✓
Timeline	✓			
Arab women in disarmament		✓		✓
Perspectives, drivers and objectives		✓	✓	✓
National and sub regional workshops			✓	✓
Means of delivery			✓	✓
Nuclear Disarmament		✓	✓	
Glion/Geneva consultations	✓			
Nuclear research and energy		✓	✓	✓
Chemical and biological weapons		✓	✓	✓
Narratives from the region	✓		✓	

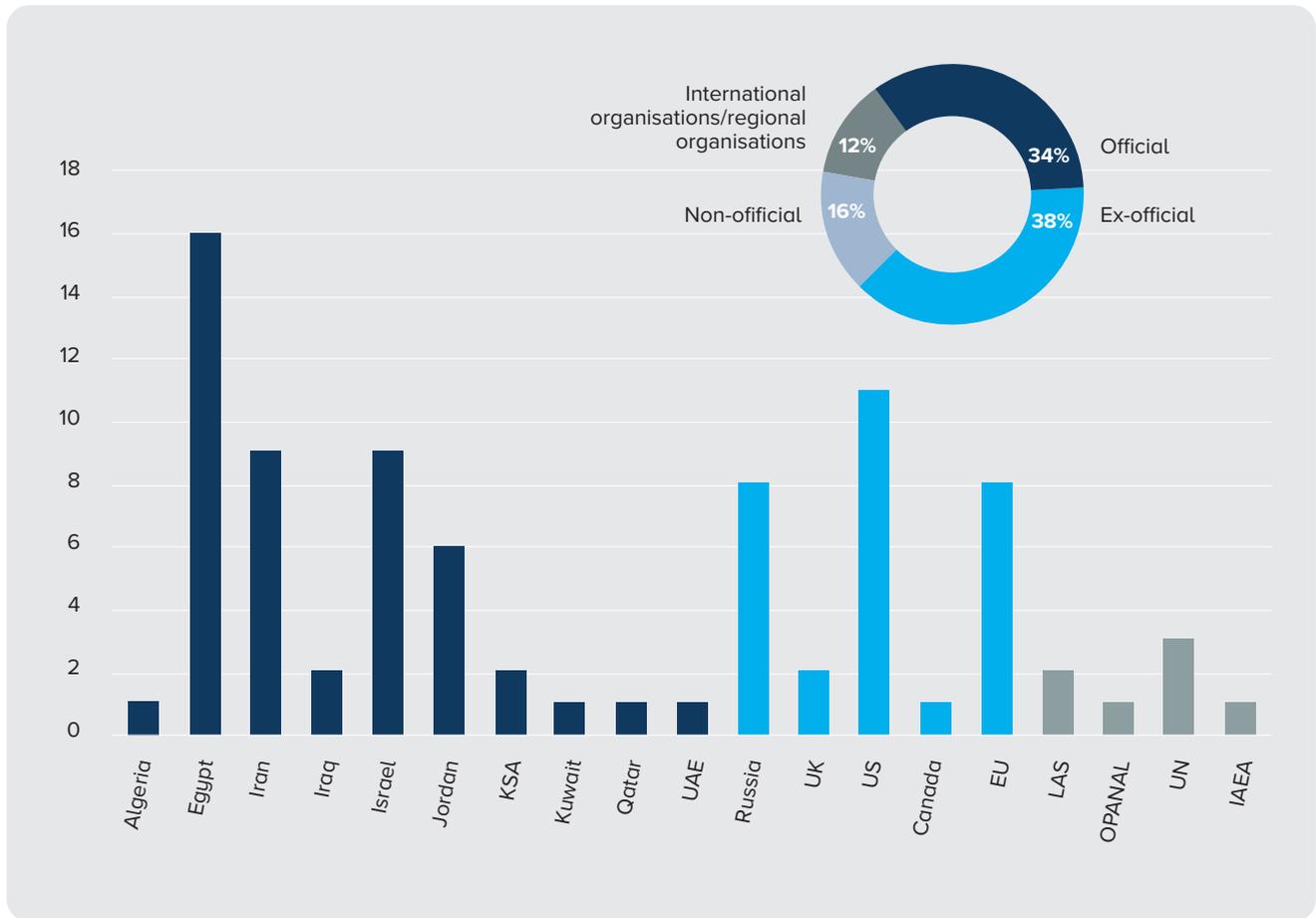
particularly those that took place after 2010. Even the UNGA-mandated ME WMDFZ Conference process has received minimal coverage and little research attention.

To address these knowledge and analytical gaps, the UNIDIR project undertook efforts to preserve the accounts and experiences from all these efforts and to gain a more in-depth understanding of the history of the ME WMDFZ proposal. The project focused in particular on the period since 2010, given the lack of publicly available information about this period. By documenting and analysing the developments since 2010, the project aimed to provide a comprehensive and accessible body of knowledge on the ME WMDFZ initiative and the challenges it faces. Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial in supporting ongoing and future efforts, as there is a risk that important details, facts, and perspectives of the actors involved, as well as lessons learned, will be lost.

To address the documentation and research gaps and preserve the experiences and lessons learned from past and ongoing efforts, UNIDIR's ME WMDfZ Project developed two freely accessible online tools: the [ME WMDfZ documents depository](#) and the [ME WMDfZ timeline](#). These tools provide access to original, unpublished documents from private collections that might otherwise have been lost forever. Both are continuously updated with new events and documents as they become available. The online tools have created a repository that serves as an institutional memory, with authoritative and factual resources for researchers and practitioners alike, thereby also contributing to the efforts of the states involved.

The project also published several research papers aimed at filling the research and knowledge gaps. [Narratives of the ME WMDfZ](#) presents the narratives of key stakeholders, describing their positions, interests, and reflections on the ME WMDfZ milestones. These narratives were gathered through over 85 interviews and reviews conducted with a diverse group of individuals, including serving officials, former officials, and experts from 19 states and from international organizations and regional organizations (see figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Nationalities and professional affiliation of interviewees and reviewers of the narratives publication



These subjective narratives provide insights beyond official statements and documents, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of contemporary witnesses involved in the ME WMDFZ issue throughout its history. The narratives shed light on how various stakeholders perceive and interpret historical ME WMDFZ-related events. They also reveal the divergent motivations, objectives and perceptions assigned to other stakeholders, emphasizing the complex and multifaceted nature of a ME WMDFZ. These narratives enrich the overall understanding of the ME WMDFZ process, particularly for those currently engaged in the issue. By highlighting the discrepancies between historical events and stakeholders' perceptions, the narratives help identify areas where further dialogue and cooperation are needed to bridge gaps and foster mutual understanding.

To further address the gap in knowledge of the period since 2010, in [The Consultations in Glion and Geneva: A View from the Negotiating Table](#) series, UNIDIR published six essays by the key negotiators and conveners of the consultations held in Glion and Geneva in 2013–14. These essays provide previously undocumented first-hand, personal accounts of the events and discussions by the participants in the consultations, which aimed at reaching an agreement on holding a ME WMDFZ Conference in Helsinki, as well as their impressions and lessons learned. To cover developments since 2018 related to the General Assembly-mandated ME WMDFZ Conference and in the lead-up to the Tenth Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the project convened a one-day conference on [Pathways Forward for the ME WMDFZ Process and 2020 NPT Review Conference](#) and published a report based on the discussions there.<sup>3</sup> A project member also published articles on the [progress towards a Zone](#) and [the relationship between a Zone and the NPT](#) in *Arms Control Today* to inform regional and international audiences about these developments.

With these seven outputs, the project has created the most comprehensive depositary and in-depth account of the evolution of the Zone process to date. By filling the research gaps and documenting and analysing past processes, especially developments since 2010, the project has created an institutional repository that provides a comprehensive and accessible body of knowledge on the ME WMDFZ initiative and the challenges it faces. These resources support the states of the region as they continue to pursue the goal of establishing a Zone. Indeed, based on feedback received by UNIDIR, these tools are already being used by delegates from Middle Eastern states in ongoing Zone negotiations.

## **OBJECTIVE 2**

### **BUILDING REGIONAL CAPACITY**

Five decades have passed since the General Assembly adopted the 1974 resolution on the establishment of in the Middle East and nearly three decades since the NPT was extended indefinitely in 1995, with the “Resolution on the Middle East” calling for a ME WMDFZ. During this time, progress towards achieving the aims of these resolutions has proceeded at a halting pace. Several initiatives for dialogue and

<sup>3</sup> The conference and report were supported by the Government of Japan.

the negotiation of a treaty have been introduced, commenced, and then stopped abruptly. Notable among these initiatives are the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) talks between 1992 and 1995 and the informal consultations between 2013-2014 on the Helsinki Conference originally planned for 2012.

This stop-and-go pace has had an impact on the ability and interest of states in the region to dedicate sustained capacity to the issue, resulting in possible erosion of institutional memory on the technical and legal aspects of a Zone and on areas of agreement. Notably, participants in previous Zone discussions are retiring, and their knowledge is not being passed on to new generations. As a result, the pool of expertise in each country is small. Some Middle Eastern states, especially those that did not actively participate in previous processes, currently have limited capacity. The stop-and-go pace has also led to some duplication of efforts in support of the different initiatives, such as convening multiple seminars over the years on similar topics.

To help preserve and build capacity, the ME WMDFZ Project has explored consistent, emerging or forgotten themes and ideas related to the Zone process, including the lessons learned from other NWFZs. These have been recorded in several publications on topics ranging from the [ways and means in which NWFZs contribute to regional peace, stability and other political objectives](#) via [lessons learned from past nuclear verification cases](#) to [lessons from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action \(JCPOA\)](#). In its publication [Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Voices from the Region](#), the project has also revisited the interests and objectives of the states of the region concerning the Zone in order to map any changes that might have occurred over the years as the political and security landscape in the region has changed.

To widen the reach of its publications and as an important step towards offering accessible tools to practitioners and experts in the region, the project has translated several of its publications into three major languages of the region: Arabic, Hebrew and Persian. By making the terminology and concepts available in the local languages, these translations help to build local capacity. For these translations, UNIDIR commissioned, whenever possible, translators from the region to further strengthen local awareness, knowledge, and expertise.

The project has also brought the insights and knowledge gained from the research and activities described above directly to states of the region through its support of the work of the UNGA-mandated Conference and its Working Committee.

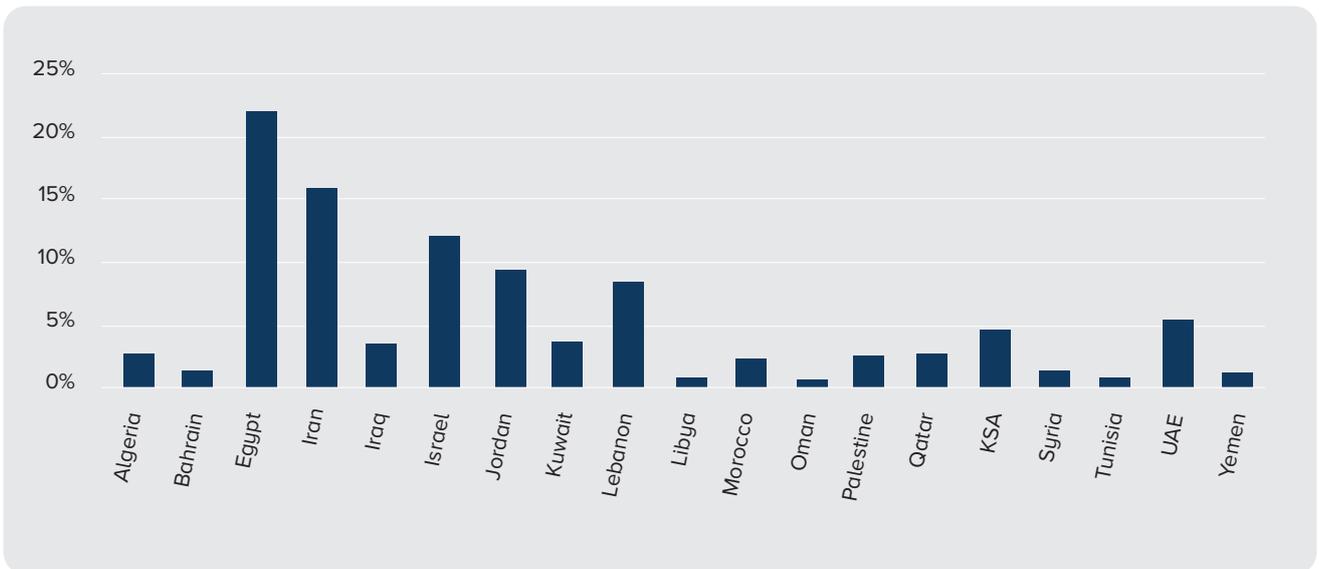
Overall, the project webpage was visited over 197,000 times, and its publications were downloaded 7,600 times by website users from over 75 countries (see Annex 3 for additional details).

Over 1,730 participants registered to the project events from 132 states, of which 19 from the region, 9 international organisations, and 8 regional organisations

**Figure 2:** Geographical distribution and affiliation of registered participants in project's events

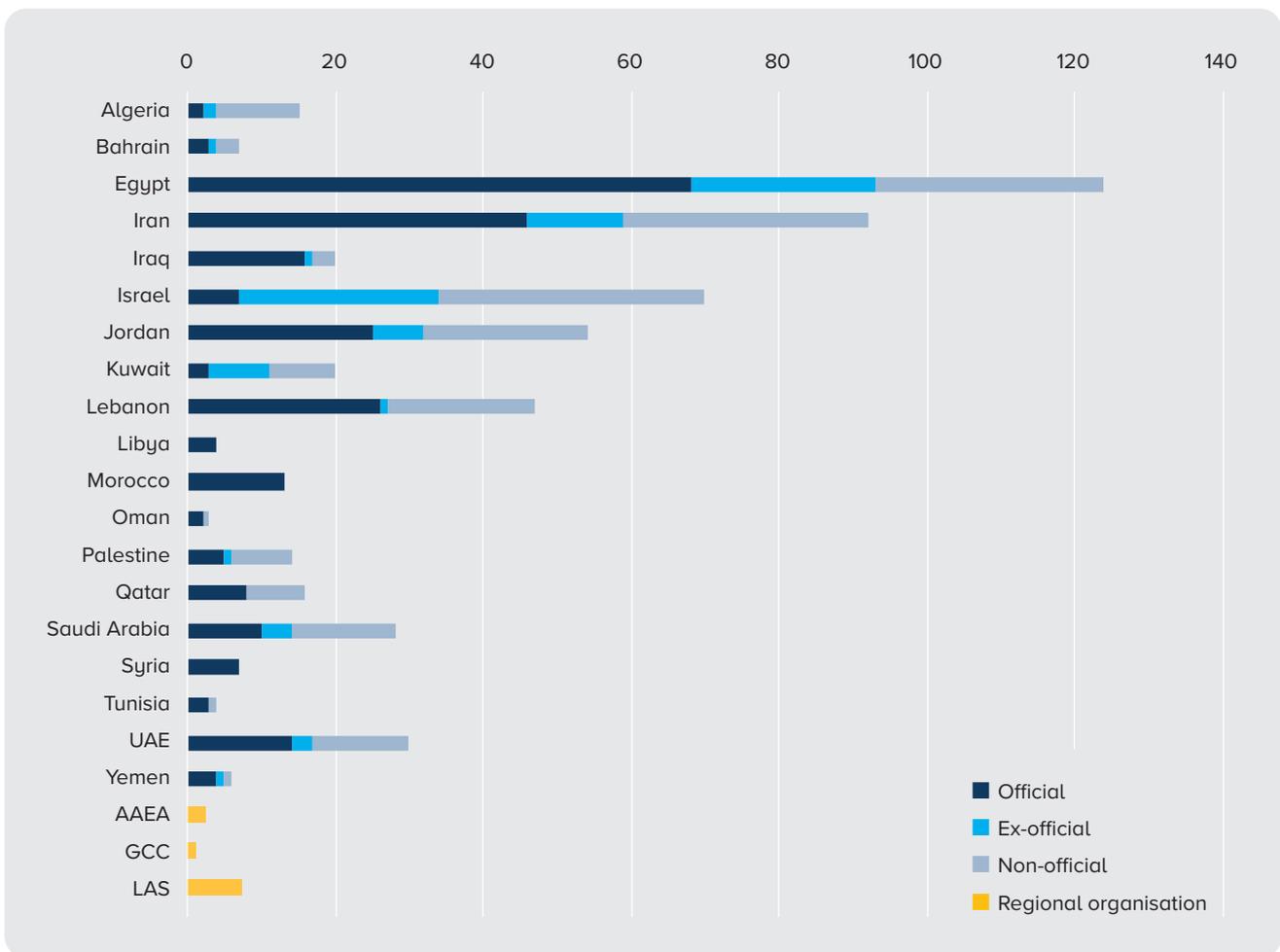


**Figure 3:** Number of regional registered participants in project's events<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Based on registered participants in the project's events (note: information was not available for all events).

**Figure 4:** Breakdown of registered participants in project's events based on affiliation<sup>5</sup>



(see figures 1-3 and Annex 3 for additional details). Top referral websites have included those of international academic institutions, disarmament organizations, and media outlets within and outside the region.

### OBJECTIVE 3

#### COLLATING NEW IDEAS AND PROPOSALS ON THE WAY FORWARD

Most previous efforts to establish a ME WMDFZ have primarily focused on the foundational aspects of the process, such as the agenda, modalities and, crucially, desired outcomes. Little to no progress has been made beyond these preliminary issues. As a result, only a limited amount of research has been dedicated to exploring the policy and technical aspects of establishing a future Zone. In the meantime, in addition to ongoing concerns related to current WMD programmes, the political and security landscape of the Middle East has undergone significant shifts in the past decade. These include the Arab uprising; ongoing conflicts that involve non-state actors in various Middle Eastern states; shifting alliances with major powers; and risks associated with existing WMD inventories, their use, regional proliferation, and nuclear

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

hedging. Additionally, ongoing military and technological developments – such as the procurement and production of new offensive and defensive capabilities, growing regional interest in acquiring nuclear energy, and the integration of cyber, space and artificial intelligence technologies in the military domain – are likely to have an impact on regional security, and possibly on the need as well as prospects for a ME WMDFZ. At the same time, Middle Eastern states have demonstrated an increased willingness to address their security challenges through regional and subregional negotiations, as exemplified by the conclusion of the Abraham Accords, the ceasefire in Yemen, the Israel–Lebanon maritime demarcation agreement, the resumption of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the Iranian–Emirati dialogue.

These political and technological developments made it crucial to assess their possible impact on the ME WMDFZ process. To assess and address ongoing and new challenges, the project conducted technical round tables and research on some of the less explored topics. These included [means of delivery, chemical and biological weapons](#) and the [development and cooperation on nuclear research and energy in the Middle East](#). Publications on these areas highlighted issues, gaps and obstacles and presented opportunities, along with preliminary findings and recommendations for the way forward (for a short overview of each activity's objectives, findings, and main takeaways, see annex 2.)

Moreover, the project gathered views and proposals on the way forward through interviews with over 85 regional officials, experts, extraregional stakeholders, and regional and international organizations. Their inputs are reflected in the introduction to the [Narratives](#) publication and throughout the report on the [perspectives and drivers for the Middle East WMD-Free Zone](#).

Finally, building upon presentations by the project staff and experts at the September 2022 session of the Working Committee, UNIDIR published a paper on [examining modalities for nuclear disarmament in the ME WMDFZ](#). The report outlines and analyses two main approaches to achieving nuclear disarmament within a future ME WMDFZ treaty: making disarmament a prerequisite for joining the treaty; or incorporating specific provisions on disarmament into the treaty. Additionally, it examines existing disarmament models and assesses their relevance in the Middle East context.

#### **OBJECTIVE 4**

### **FOSTERING DIALOGUE AMONG EXPERTS AND POLICYMAKERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Achieving effective and inclusive dialogue among states of the region has long been recognized as a critical challenge and necessity for making progress not only on the Zone and other proliferation challenges but also on the region's broader security challenges. However, past talks on these issues have suffered from notable absences: the ACRS talks did not include Iraq, Iran or Libya, while the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon chose not to participate; Iran only attended the first meeting of the informal consultations in Glion and Geneva;

the exclusion of Iran's neighbours from the JCPOA negotiation remains a sore point for GCC states; and Israel has not so far attended the sessions of the UNGA-mandated ME WMDFZ Conference.

In the absence of direct talks among all states of the region, this objective of the project is crucial. In addition to deficiencies in participation in the existing official process on the issue, there are only limited opportunities for Track 1.5 talks or spaces for dialogue among experts and practitioners.

The project sought to address this gap by providing an additional platform for discreet and in-depth dialogue that brought together a diverse group of stakeholders from Middle Eastern states and their external partners. These dialogues not only provided substantive input and ideas for a ME WMDFZ but, most importantly, also contributed to fostering the habit of engagement among a wide range of officials, practitioners, and experts. They also facilitated a better understanding of the positions held by different states of the region.

Convening dialogues on additional levels, such as subregional and national dialogues, has helped raise awareness and engage a more diverse and comprehensive group of stakeholders. This included women, scientists, military personnel, and young experts, among others, who are already involved in or are expected to be part of the policymaking process or implementation of a future Zone. This engagement informed publications such as [a factsheet on the participation of Arab women in international security and disarmament](#). It also contributed to the further development of Middle Eastern states' positions on the issue and the emergence of new ideas.

## SECTION 3

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

The key takeaways presented below are based solely on the outcomes of the activities and outputs of the ME WMDFZ Project, distilled from the activities, publications and dialogues described in section 2. The events and publications were designed to capture various views, and these key takeaways are the outcome of this process. As such, the takeaways are descriptive rather than prescriptive: they represent information gathered and do not represent recommendations by UNIDIR, the project team or its Reference Group (for a short overview of each activity's objectives, findings and main takeaways, see annex 2.)

### **3.1. FACTORS WITH AN IMPACT ON PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ZONE**

Despite the widespread official support that the proposal has received from states within and beyond the region, nearly five decades after the adoption of the 1974 resolution on the "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East" and after several initiatives, resolutions and meetings, a Zone has not yet materialized. The representatives from states of the region currently participating in the UNGA-mandated Conference have acknowledged that it may take a relatively long time to achieve its goal of elaborating a treaty establishing the Zone. The President of the Conference's third session, Jeanne Mrad of Lebanon, noted that the "journey to reach our objective is a very challenging one".<sup>6</sup>

Several factors have had an impact on the progress towards the establishment of a Zone. Some of them are long-lasting and well-covered topics, such as

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, "Sustained Efforts Will Make Legally Binding Treaty Possible, Chair Says, as Middle East Weapons-of-Mass-Destruction-Free Zone Conference Ends Third Session," DC/3856, 18 November 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/dc3856.doc.htm>.

the lack of adherence in WMD treaties, violations of existing non-proliferation commitments, differing positions on the objective and sequencing of a ME WMDFZ, and the prevalence of mistrust in the region. The following takeaways shed light on less-explored areas and provide fresh and contemporary insights into the complexities surrounding the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East. They intentionally avoid repeating previously discussed findings that have been extensively covered in past research.

### **3.1.1. Changing and complex regional political and security dynamics**

Support among all Middle Eastern states for creating a ME WMDFZ has been a consistent feature of the region for decades. However, so have disagreements over how to achieve it. Recent changes in the region have made the creation of a ME WMDFZ more pressing, yet, complex. For example, threat perceptions have evolved due to the weakening and collapse of states resulting in the proliferation of terrorist groups, which has become a top concern in the region. Additionally, military interventions by extraregional states and the perceived US pivot away from the region have prompted states to prioritize their domestic affairs and pursue bilateral or small-group (rather than region-wide) arrangements such as the Abraham Accords and the resumption of Saudi–Iranian diplomatic relations. Middle Eastern states have dedicated less attention and capacity to addressing long-standing issues like a ME WMDFZ. Despite concerns about WMD capabilities and future proliferation, several Middle Eastern states have indicated a need to rely on deterrent strategies and to increase their conventional defensive and offensive capabilities – strategies that could result in further regional insecurity and instability. The impact of the reliance on deterrence can also be observed in the growing conventional arms race, particularly in the pursuit, use and development of new military technologies such as uncrewed aerial vehicles, precision-guided and hypersonic missiles, cyber capabilities, and artificial intelligence-enabled systems.

There are disagreements within the region regarding the inclusion in the Zone process of some of the issues mentioned above. Some argue that their inclusion will overburden an already complicated process and that the ME WMDFZ could be realized by all states simply by joining the existing WMD-related treaties. At least one state indicated that, if its concerns related to regional security were not addressed in parallel with or before the creation of a Zone, it could see no or few benefits of joining it. Others in the region have expressed the view that if their concerns in the Zone context – especially means of delivery, nuclear hedging, and Israel’s absence – are not addressed, then their level of interest and engagement in the current Zone process will fall.

### **3.1.2. Geopolitical tensions**

All regional processes on a ME WMDFZ, on non-proliferation (e.g., the JCPOA) and on disarmament (e.g., in Iraq, Libya and Syria) have been initiated, convened, facilitated or supported by extraregional states, in particular the United States and the Russian Federation. However, the current strains in the

relationship between these two major powers have resulted in the loss of valuable active engagement with the Zone process and other regional non-proliferation efforts. As co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, many states in the region view Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States as having a special responsibility to ensure the establishment of a ME WMDFZ. In the past, cooperation between the United States and Russia has been essential for addressing proliferation challenges in the region. Even during challenging times, they compartmentalized regional non-proliferation efforts, keeping them separate from their own differences. However, today, some major powers do not prioritize cooperation in addressing non-proliferation challenges as much as they have in the past.

The value of the engagement of these major powers should not be underestimated. Their involvement continues to be seen by Middle Eastern states as a seal of legitimacy for the Zone process. At the same time, the Middle East is also becoming another space where China, Russia and the United States compete in areas such as energy, the sale of weapons, and the building of military bases and other infrastructure. These dynamics further complicate the regional landscape and add additional complexities – but possibly also opportunities – for promoting the establishment of a ME WMDFZ.

### **3.1.3. The potential developmental and cooperation benefits of a Zone are insufficient**

In addition to the potential security benefits of establishing a ME WMDFZ, officials and experts have frequently argued that a Zone would create opportunities for development and cooperation among states of the region in other areas, such as nuclear energy, scientific research, and assistance in nuclear, biological or chemical sciences. However, what is evident from the research and dialogues conducted throughout the project is that the states intending to pursue some of these benefits prefer to do so (or are already doing so) unilaterally, bilaterally or subregionally, with a Zone continuing to be seen primarily as a security measure.

Consequently, whether a state decides to negotiate, join and adhere to a ME WMDFZ depends primarily on whether it perceives the process and the prospective treaty as enhancing its national security or, at the very least, not undermining it. Therefore, it is unsurprising that security incentives remain the primary motivation for engagement with the ME WMDFZ process. For at least one state in the region, the perceived security disincentives and missing incentives outweigh the potential benefits, leading to its absence from the process and others' passive participation.

## **3.2. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ME WMDFZ AND RELATED PROCESSES**

Identifying lessons learned from past initiatives on the establishment of a ME WMDFZ and other relevant processes and providing them to policymakers, practitioners and experts has been an important objective of the project. The

following takeaways are based on the project activities; they are presented in the sequence of a negotiation process and are not listed in order of importance.

### **3.2.1. The importance of documenting processes**

Record-keeping and documentation of past processes have been inconsistent or non-existent. The lack of accurate historical records has led to diverging accounts of events and participating states' positions and actions. The absence of written records and reliance on oral communication has contributed to a loss of knowledge regarding the interplay between various actors and processes, previous areas of agreement, and agreed-upon texts. It has also fuelled mistrust among states as reciprocal accusations and assignments of blame for failure have become prevalent.

Ensuring the preservation of institutional memory and transmitting an accurate understanding of the conduct and content of ongoing and past processes is essential for effective engagement in the ME WMDfZ negotiations. For example, the production and sharing of written records of previous processes when a new process starts or when a new member joins a delegation are crucial to ensure continuity and to provide a better understanding of other delegations' positions. This helps minimize misunderstandings and avoid duplication of efforts. The availability of such records has a direct impact on the sustainability and effectiveness of negotiations. Therefore, at the very least, records should be produced by the process's sponsor and made available to delegations.

Ideally, records should also be made available to practitioners and researchers when possible. Providing such information in the past has enabled them to provide policy-relevant and technical advice in support of the negotiation process. However, researchers recognize that, at times, access to the information may not be possible due to the need for confidentiality during ongoing processes.

### **3.2.2. The impact of the composition of negotiation teams**

Many past and current negotiators have emphasized the human factor in relation to the composition of the negotiation teams and its impact on constructive deliberations. Specific elements related to the composition of the negotiating teams that could increase chances for constructive deliberations are highlighted by an analysis of interviews with current and former officials conducted as part of the Narratives publication and personal accounts by the negotiators in the informal consultations in Glion and Geneva. These elements include seniority, proximity to decision-makers and continuity.

Past rounds of negotiations on a ME WMDfZ have demonstrated that the composition of negotiation teams and continuity in representation have been important for achieving success. Continuity helped to build rapport and trust among negotiators, sustained the momentum of talks, and ensured continuity of knowledge regarding positions, compromises reached and areas of disagreement. While operational requirements may not always allow for complete continuity, internal record-keeping can address some of these concerns.

Another important factor mentioned throughout the project activities was how initial and sustained political support and backing from senior policymakers were essential factors for success. Some past processes began with the support of senior officials, but this support dwindled over time due to competing national and regional priorities. In some negotiations, senior decision-makers showed no interest or involvement at any point, signalling – both to their own national delegation and the other participating states – disinterest in and deprioritization of the topic.

### **3.2.3. Agreeing on objectives and modalities from the outset**

A crucial lesson learned from previous and ongoing ME WMDFZ talks is the importance of establishing mutual understanding regarding political objectives, scope and mandate before entering into the formal negotiations. Trying to determine these elements during the negotiation process itself can lead to difficulties and even the collapse of the talks. While these aspects can naturally evolve and can be modified throughout the negotiations if agreed upon by the parties, having a clear, agreed starting point has proved to be crucial for maintaining the negotiations.

Mutual agreement on these negotiation elements has been anchored in the phrase “arrangements freely arrived at”, which appears in several official documents related to a Middle East Zone. It also appears in official United Nations documents relating to NWFZs in general, such as the guidelines on establishing NWFZs developed in 1999 by the United Nations Disarmament Commission.<sup>7</sup> However, differing interpretations of this phrase have emerged between Arab states and Iran on one side and Israel on the other. Israel believes that “freely arrived at” implies agreement on launching the negotiations, including all their organizational and political aspects. In contrast, Arab states and Iran consider that the requirement for “arrangements freely arrived at” is fulfilled by decision-making by consensus during the negotiation process itself.

Another important aspect related to the objectives and modalities of the treaty is its scope. Certain topics such as nuclear disarmament, nuclear verification, biological weapons verification, delivery systems and confidence-building measures have received little attention in past negotiations. Further deliberation is required on how these should be addressed within a ME WMDFZ framework. This is particularly the case for verifying nuclear disarmament, biological weapons verification and delivery systems, for which there are few readily available solutions that may be adapted from existing WMD treaties. These topics pose specific challenges that require in-depth discussions and considerations.

### **3.2.4. Defining the role of and expectations of extraregional parties involved in the process**

Another important lesson learned from past processes is the significance of regional parties and extraregional players clarifying and agreeing on the role assigned to extraregional parties in the ME WMDFZ negotiation process.

<sup>7</sup> UNGA, “UNDC Report on Guidelines for the Establishment of NWFZs,” 6 May 1999, <https://undir.org/node/5645>.

Extraregional actors, such as the Russia, United Kingdom, the United States and the United Nations, have played various roles in the ME WMDFZ process, including as initiators, conveners, mediators, legitimators, guarantors and enforcers. However, there has been a lack of clarity regarding the specific roles of these external parties and disagreements among states of the region on how these roles should be conducted. This lack of clarity and mismatched expectations have resulted in mistrust and accusations against the extraregional parties. This, in turn, has led to reluctance from extra-regional parties to further engage in the process.

To foster constructive involvement, it is crucial for Middle Eastern states to define and agree upon the roles of extraregional parties among themselves and with these players. Such an understanding and engagement could mitigate misunderstandings, enhance trust and create a more conducive environment for effective engagement by extraregional actors in the ME WMDFZ negotiations.

### **3.2.5. Price of a failed process**

The final lesson learned from past processes is the high cost of failed negotiations. Each instance of failed negotiation or collapsed process contributes to increased suspicion and scepticism among Middle Eastern states. It leads to frustration with the overall initiative and a decrease in genuine interest in pursuing it meaningfully.

A notable consequence of failed processes has been the tendency for states to blame their counterparts for lacking seriousness or having hidden agendas when engaging in negotiations. This can include accusations of attempts to isolate specific countries, divert attention from other pressing issues, or trap each other into unacceptable or unsustainable agreements. These dynamics contribute to mistrust, lead to entrenchment and inflexibility in states' positions, and make it difficult to establish a conducive atmosphere and find common ground.

## **3.3. IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINED AND FOCUSED DIALOGUE**

The need to keep channels open between states of the region to allow for de-escalation and cooperation has been highlighted throughout the project's interviews, events and publications. Dialogue as a critical enabling factor for progress can be found in the recommendations of any political or security-related process. Yet, despite the consensus on its importance and the proliferation of forums for dialogue in the region, its potential is not always fully utilized. Through the organization of several meetings, the ME WMDFZ Project has identified several factors relating to the set-up, format and composition of such dialogues that can contribute to them having more productive outcomes.

### **3.3.1. The value of national and subregional dialogue**

ME WMDFZ talks have traditionally emphasized the importance of all-inclusive dialogue among all states of the region. However, it is also valuable to complement these broader discussions with smaller national and subregional

dialogues. While the benefits of an all-inclusive format are clear, there are important advantages to conducting focused discussions at the national and subregional levels.

On the subregional and national levels, bringing together diverse stakeholders, such as diplomats, national security institutes and national implementation authorities, allows for a deeper understanding of subregional and national concerns and interests. These interactions help identify issues that have a direct impact on national policies, which provides diplomats with a comprehensive understanding of the implications for their country. This dialogue can enable these diplomats to develop informed policies and positions for future negotiations, especially if the discussions are structured around clearly defined topics. For instance, discussions on a state's national positions related to transit, visitation and the geographical delineation of a future Zone could involve participants from the foreign and interior ministries, the navy and the coastguard. This collaborative approach would enable stakeholders to grasp the "bigger picture" and formulate positions that address their respective concerns and jurisdictions in a way that could have an impact on that state's positions.

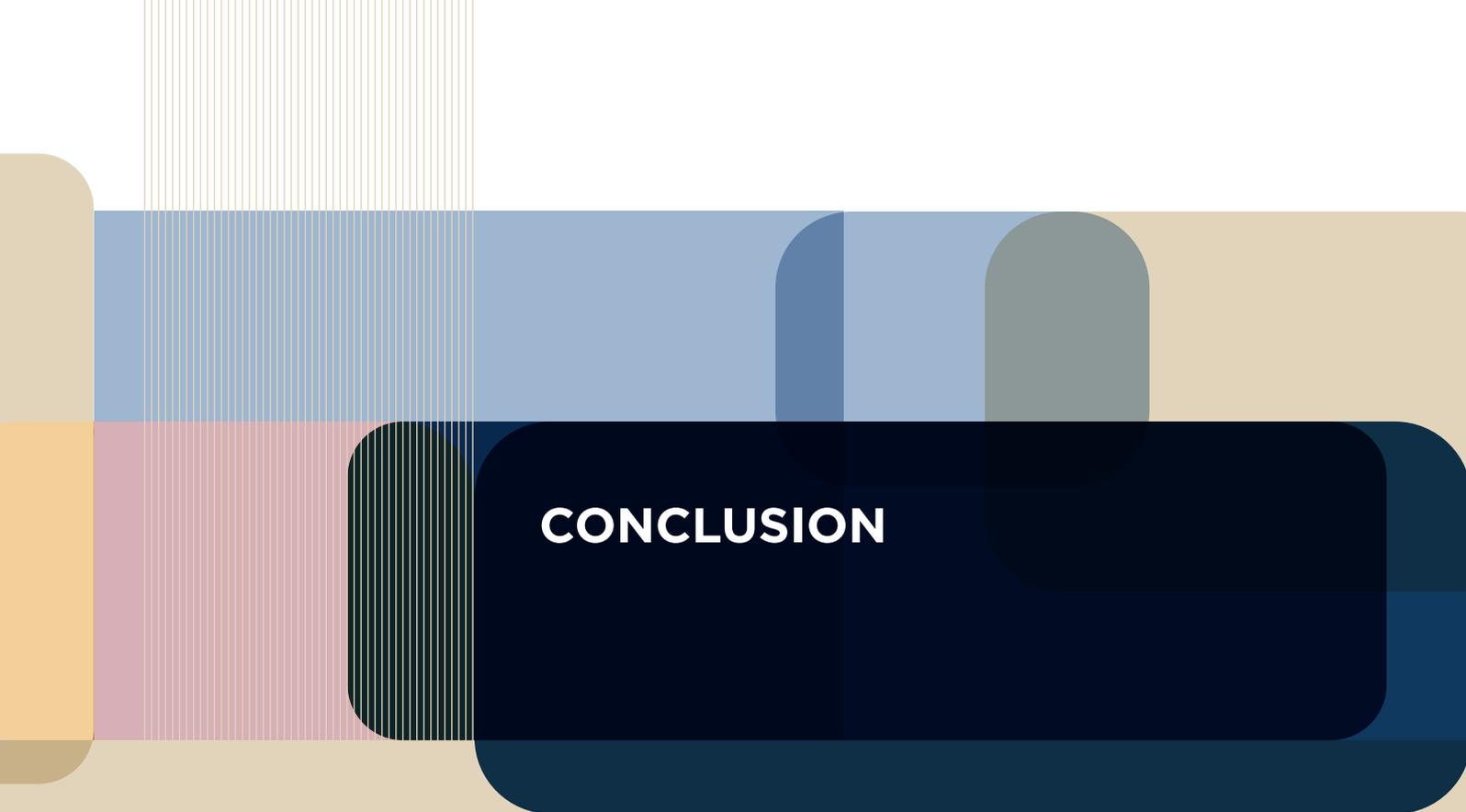
The national format also raises awareness, creates capacity, and increases interest and involvement among a broader group of relevant stakeholders within the country. This is important because some key stakeholders who may not have been previously exposed to the ME WMDFZ issue – such as military personnel, scientists, and regulators – could ultimately be involved in its implementation. Therefore, it is crucial to familiarize them with the issue and include them in developing relevant national policies.

### **3.3.2. Strengthening national and regional support structures for a ME WMDFZ**

Experts from outside government, including academics and scientists, have significant potential to contribute to the discussions and outcomes of national, subregional and regional discussions on a ME WMDFZ. Their involvement in various forums, such as Track 1.5 meetings that bring together officials and experts, can foster relationships, facilitate critical discussions and complement national expertise.

In particular, the scientific community plays a vital role in creating an ecosystem of scientific research and education on non-proliferation and disarmament. Their contributions establish a baseline of knowledge and a pipeline for expertise within states, which enables informed decision-making. States can further capitalize on scientific knowledge by including scientists in national processes, promoting education and research in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and establishing specialized centres for Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear research and capacity-building. By doing so, they can leverage scientific expertise to inform negotiations and ensure effective implementation of treaty obligations once a ME WMDFZ is established.

Involving experts, academics and scientists through Track 1.5, Track 2 and STEM initiatives is vital for enhancing capacity and fostering informed discussions. It will also ensure the availability of scientific expertise to inform negotiations and future implementation efforts related to a ME WMDFZ. While it is essential to recognize the limitations of civil society and Track 1.5 and Track 2 initiatives in the absence of an official Track 1 process, they can continue to operate and maintain momentum even when formal processes are suspended. These initiatives foster critical discussions and nurturing expertise, leaving them well-positioned to re-engage when processes resume.



## CONCLUSION

Establishing a ME WMDFZ is imperative to address the dangers posed by existing and suspected WMD programmes, to prevent the proliferation of such weapons, and reduce the risk of potential conflict and instability within the region and beyond. Despite the widespread support for this initiative, progress has been hindered by deep-rooted divisions among Middle Eastern states on how to move forwards and by a lack of mutual trust. Current regional and international developments have only underscored the urgency of achieving a ME WMDFZ but have also made the task more complex.

Against this challenging background, the ME WMDFZ Project has generated a multitude of ideas and insights based on past processes and initiatives, existing non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament tools, as well as innovative approaches to address the evolving regional security landscape. Adopting such measures will require the states of the region to demonstrate flexibility, courage and foresight. By collaboratively working towards this common objective, Middle Eastern states can pave the way for a safer and more secure future for all.

## ANNEX 1

### PROJECT PUBLICATIONS AND EVENTS

List of Publications			
	Date	Activity	Authors
1.	April 2020	Pathways forward for the ME WMDFZ Process and 2020 NPT Review Conference: Conference Report*	Chen Zak Kane
2.	July 2020	The Ways and Means in which Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones Contribute to Regional Peace, Stability and Other Political Objectives	Renata Dwan and Chen Zak Kane
3.	October 2020	Middle East WMDFZ Document Depository	UNIDIR
4.	January 2021	Nuclear Verification in a Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Lessons from Past Verification Cases and Other Precedents	John Carlson
5.	May 2021	From the Iran Nuclear Deal to a Middle East Zone? Lessons from the JCPOA for an ME WMDFZ	Edited by Farzan Sabet and Chen Zak Kane
6.	June 2021	Middle East WMDFZ Timeline	UNIDIR
7.	October 2021	Factsheet: Arab Women in International Security and Disarmament	UNIDIR
8.	March 2022	Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Voices from the Region	Edited by Tomisha Bino, James Revill and Chen Zak Kane
9.	October 2022	Means of Delivery: A Complex and Evolving issue in the Middle East WMD-Free Zone Initiative	Nasser bin Nasser
10.	May 2023	Examining Modalities for Nuclear Disarmament in the Middle East WMD-Free Zone Treaty	Tomisha Bino and Karim Haggag
11.	May 2023- June 2023	The Consultations in Glion and Geneva: A View from the Negotiating Table	Wael Al Assad, Tom Countryman, Jeremy Issacharoff, Angela Kane, Jaakko Laajava, and Mikhail Ulyanov
12.	June 2023	Development and Cooperation on Nuclear Research and Energy in the Middle East – Workshop Report	Sarah Ruth Opatowski
13.	June 2023	Addressing Chemical and Biological Weapons Challenges through the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone	Sarah Ruth Opatowski
14.	June 2023	Narratives on the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone: Historical Accounts, Drivers, and Themes	Farzan Sabet
15.	June 2023	Middle East WMD-Free Zone Project: Final Report	Tomisha Bino and Chen Zak Kane

\*Funded by the Government of Japan

## List of Events

	Date	Activity	Location	Format
1.	10 October 2019	Project launch event at the United Nations First Committee	UNHQ, New York, USA	By invitation
2.	22 January 2020	Workshop on "Egyptian perspectives on the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone". Co-organized with the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (ECFA), Cairo, Egypt	Cairo, Egypt	By invitation
3.	6 February 2020	Conference on "The ME WMDFZ Process, 2020 NPT RevCon and pathways forward"*	UNOG, Geneva, Switzerland	By invitation
4.	9 September 2020	Roundtable on "Nuclear Verification in the ME WMDFZ: Lessons Learned from Past Verification Cases"	Virtual	By invitation
5.	27 October 2020	Roundtable on "Lessons from the JCPOA for the ME WMDFZ"	Virtual	By invitation
6.	26 January 2021	Launch event of the "Nuclear Verification in a Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Lessons Learned from Past Verification Cases" report	Virtual	Public
7.	9-10 February 2021	Workshop on "Israeli perspectives on Regional Security, Non-proliferation, and the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone," co-organized with the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv, Israel	Virtual	By invitation
8.	24-25 March 2021	Roundtable on "Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the ME WMDFZ: Voices from the Region"	Virtual	By invitation
9.	27 May 2021	Launch event of the "Lessons from the JCPOA for the ME WMDFZ" report	Virtual	Public
10.	8 June 2021 and 13 July 2021	Roundtables on "Advancing the role of women in international security Views from the Middle East"	Virtual	By invitation
11.	16 June 2021	Launch event of the Middle East WMDFZ Timeline and Document Depository	Virtual	Public
12.	11 January 2022	Side event planned for the Tenth NPT Review Conference on "The Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Reflecting on the Past and Looking at the Future"	Virtual	Public
13.	1-2 February 2022	Workshop on "Development and Cooperation on Nuclear Research and Energy in the Middle East in the Context of a WMD-Free Zone"	Virtual	By invitation
14.	30 February 2022	Launch event of the "Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the ME WMDFZ: Voices from the Region" report	Virtual	Public

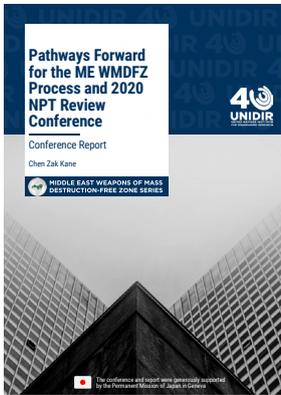
\*Funded by the Government of Japan

## List of Events

Date	Activity	Location	Format
15. 27 April 2022	Workshop on "Perspectives on the Middle East WMD-Free Zone and Regional Security" co-organised with the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), Tehran, Iran	Virtual	By invitation
16. 17-18 May 2022	Workshop on "Addressing Chemical and Biological Weapons Challenges through the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone"	Virtual	By invitation
17. 23 May 2022	Roundtable on "Means of Delivery in the Context of a Middle East WMD-Free Zone"	Virtual	By invitation
18. 23 May 2022	Side event at the 10th NPT Review Conference on "Narratives on the Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Historical Accounts, Drivers, and Themes"	UNHQ, New York, USA	Hybrid (public and virtual)
19. 03 November 2022	Launch event of "Means of Delivery in the Context of a Middle East WMD-Free Zone" report	Virtual	By invitation
20. 15 January 2023	Workshop on "Regional Security Perspectives in the Gulf Region," co-organised with the Bahrain Centre for Strategic, International and Energy Studies (Derasat)	Manama, Bahrain	By invitation
21. 18 February 2023	Validation workshop on "UNIDIR ME WMDFZ Project Activities and Takeaways"	Prague, Czech Republic	By invitation
22. 16 May 2023	Launch event of the "Examining Modalities in Nuclear Disarmament in the Middle East WMD-Free Zone Treaty" report	Virtual	Public
23. 26 June 2023	Launch event of the UNIDIR ME WMDFZ Project Final Report	UNOG, Geneva, Switzerland	Hybrid (public and virtual)

## ANNEX 2

# PROJECT PUBLICATIONS - FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The report's executive summary is also available in [Arabic](#), [Hebrew](#) and [Persian](#)

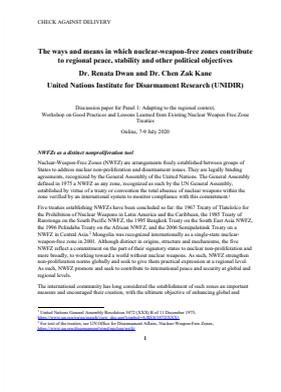


### Pathways Forward for the ME WMDFZ Process and 2020 NPT Review Conference: Conference Report

The report summarizes a UNIDIR workshop that took place in February 2020 exploring the impact of the ME WMDFZ issue on the upcoming 10th NPT Review Conference. The report identifies persistent challenges related to proliferation in the region and proposals for the ME WMDFZ in NPT Review cycles since 1995. Achieving the ME WMDFZ has become increasingly complex due to international and regional developments. The report emphasizes the importance of acknowledging past grievances, differing objectives, mistrust, conflicts and national security interests to understand the current state and prospects of the process. The positive outcome of the first session of the UNGA-mandated ME WMDFZ Conference that took place in November 2019 is seen as a potential relief for pressure in the upcoming 2020 NPT RevCon. Diverse opinions exist regarding the causes of WMD proliferation in the region and the effectiveness of the ME WMDFZ as a solution to these problems. The report suggests specific measures and mechanisms to address mistrust and support the ME WMDFZ process such as ongoing engagement and dialogue among relevant parties to foster trust and confidence; the significance of international support and cooperation in establishing the Zone; the need for a comprehensive regional security mechanism involving all states in the region, addressing all security concerns and interests, while simultaneously addressing the root causes of insecurity and the implementation of confidence-building measures as crucial factors to facilitate the establishment of a ME WMDFZ.

### The Ways and Means in Which Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones Contribute to Regional Peace, Stability, and Other Political Objectives

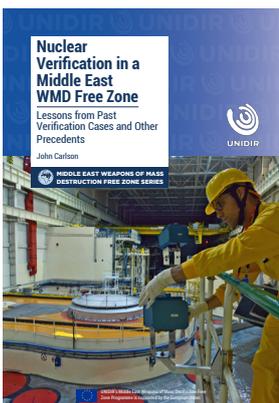
The paper was presented at the ME WMDFZ Conference Intersessional Workshop in July 2020. The paper discusses the significance of Nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) as a distinct non-proliferation and disarmament tool that preceded the NPT. NWFZs have effectively contributed to regional and global peace, stability, and cooperation by reducing nuclear risks, renouncing nuclear weapons, strengthening non-proliferation efforts, and fostering confidence and cooperation among regional states. The existing five NWFZs were established to protect against external threats from nuclear-armed states and mitigate the consequences of nuclear testing. Since most external and regional obstacles were resolved before these zone negotiations, in three of the five cases, the treaty was concluded relatively quickly and the entry into force was achieved within two to three years. Commitments by NWSs have been limited, with only the Treaty of Tlatelolco ratified by all five NPT NWSs. The zones created major legal and political barriers to any potential breakout state and reinforced non-proliferation norms. While in the five existing NWFZs the absence of any inter-state or intrastate conflict was not a prerequisite for the establishment of a zone, the absence of significant major conflict and a recognition of shared interest was critical. Limited trust among regional states in the Middle East, past noncompliance with international WMD regimes and limited experience with regional cooperation mechanisms further complicate pathways to zone development. The distinct experience of each NWFZ illustrates that there is no single route to success. It also highlights how overlapping arrangements, including bilateral, plurilateral, and regional arrangements, might contribute to the establishment of the zone.





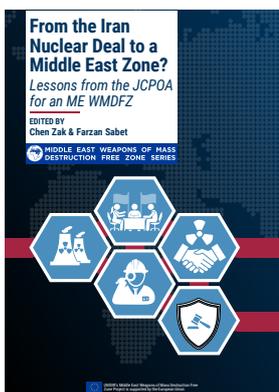
### Middle East WMD Free Zone Document Depository

The Document Depository is one part of the two publicly available and freely accessible online tools the ME WMDFZ developed and published. It acts as a resource hub that collects and organizes the main documents related to the evolution of the ME WMDFZ. Documents can be sorted and filtered by date, originating forum or state, and type of document. It currently has a total of 510 documents and includes annual resolutions, national statements on the ME WMDFZ process originating from states that will make up the ME WMDFZ, the depositories states/co-conveners, and International Organizations or forums named in any of the resolutions pertaining to the ME WMDFZ.



### Nuclear Verification in a Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Lessons from Past Verification Cases and Other Precedents

Verification is essential for establishing and maintaining a ME WMDFZ. The paper focuses on nuclear aspects but acknowledges the need for complementary measures for other WMD. The goal of verification is to ensure nuclear material and activities are solely for peaceful purposes. Prohibitions on nuclear weapons research, possession, stationing, and testing should be covered by appropriate verification arrangements. Existing treaties like the NPT, IAEA safeguards, CTBT, and regional agreements can serve as a foundation. The IAEA should play a central role in verification, drawing from its experience and comprehensive safeguards system, the Additional Protocol and JCPOA. Regional verification systems with mutual inspections can enhance trust. Nuclear latency, the ability to produce weapons, poses a challenge, requiring timely warning and constraints on sensitive activities. The paper suggests options for dealing with enrichment and reprocessing activities, including limiting scale and stockpiles or prohibiting national enrichment and reprocessing altogether. Verification should be seen as cooperative, benefiting all states by reducing tensions and the risk of an arms race. Negotiations on the zone can build confidence, and collaboration in developing verification measures can enhance trust. Nuclear issues should be addressed in the broader context of other WMD.



The report's executive summary is also available in [Arabic](#), [Hebrew](#) and [Persian](#)



### From the Iran Nuclear Deal to a Middle East Zone? Lessons from the JCPOA for an ME WMDFZ

While the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) explicitly states that it "should not be considered as setting precedents for any other state or for fundamental principles of international law" its unique negotiations process, provisions, and implementation created an important set of tools that could provide valuable insights and lessons for a ME WMDFZ. This essay series explores lessons from the JCPOA for the ME WMDFZ through essays focusing on five key themes: the structure and format of the negotiations; nuclear fuel cycle activities and research; safeguards and verification; nuclear cooperation; and compliance and enforcement. While the JCPOA is not a blueprint for a ME WMDFZ, lessons relevant to the ME WMDFZ include the importance of having a clear and comprehensive negotiating mandate; the need to build trust and confidence between the parties through a combination of factors, including regular dialogue, transparency, and verification; the importance of flexibility and compromise; the importance of verification and monitoring mechanisms; the utility of confidence-building measures such as transparency and information-sharing, and the limitation of the compliance and enforcement mechanisms adopted under the JCPOA.

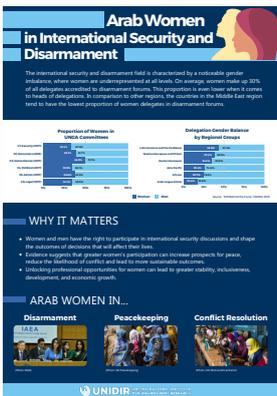


The Timeline is also available in [Arabic](#), [Hebrew](#), and [Persian](#)



### Middle East WMDFZ Timeline

The ME WMDFZ Timeline is one of the two publicly available and freely accessible online tools the ME WMDFZ developed and published in collaboration with officials, experts, and regional stakeholders. The objective of the timeline is to create a baseline of knowledge and provide information over 60 years on the key diplomatic milestones of the ME WMDFZ. It includes over 150 milestones of the zone, including events, resolutions, meetings, and Zone related initiatives from the NPT, UN General Assembly, IAEA General Conference, and regional forums. The Timeline is a comprehensive resource, contributing to a deeper understanding of the process’s history and supporting endeavours for a WMD-free Middle East.

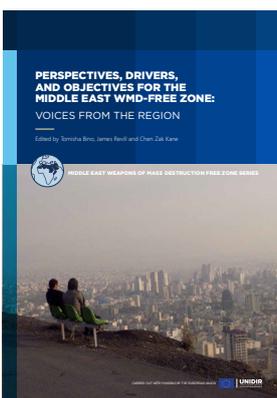


The factsheet is also available in [Arabic](#)



### Factsheet: Arab Women in International Security and Disarmament

The international security and disarmament field faces a gender imbalance, with women being underrepresented. On average, women make up only 30% of delegates in disarmament forums, with the Middle East having the lowest proportion. Women have the right to contribute to security discussions and their increased participation can lead to sustainable outcomes. UNIDIR roundtables have highlighted progress and obstacles in achieving gender equality in the field. Gender stereotypes, institutional culture, work-life balance, and the lack of role models hinder women’s inclusion. To address these challenges, educational programs, mentorship initiatives, and localized communication strategies should be implemented. Women’s participation and experiences in the security field should be highlighted, and communication strategies should be localized to emphasize the importance of women’s involvement. Gender equality and diversity should be promoted in institutional cultures, and specific targets should be set for achieving gender parity, including in leadership positions.



The report’s executive summary is also available in [Arabic](#), [Hebrew](#), and [Persian](#)



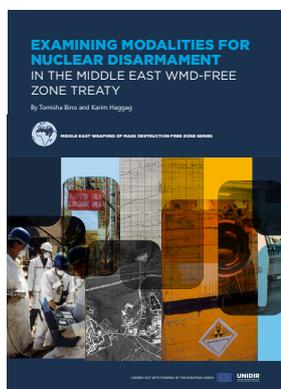
### Perspectives, Drivers, and Objectives for the Middle East WMD-Free Zone: Voices from the Region

In this publication, experts from eight Middle Eastern states discuss the positions and potential incentives, as well as disincentives and missing incentives for their country’s engagement with the ME WMDFZ. By identifying and collating the incentives of different states in the region, this publication aims to promote better understanding of regional states’ security dilemmas and specific concerns related to the WMDFZ; to identify points of convergence that can be built upon and points of divergence that need to be bridged; to facilitate exchange and dialogue among regional experts, and to expand regional capacity. Based on these eight essays, national security interests drive participation or lack thereof in the Zone negotiations. Although the incentives identified by the authors outnumber the disincentives and missing incentives, this has not resulted in more active participation or progress towards establishing a ME WMDFZ. For some states, the incentives relate to security are outweighed by the security disincentives and missing incentives. Mistrust among states in the region is a common thread through the essays. Suggested measures to address mistrust include cooperative measures such the adoption of CBMs; the importance of reliable verification, compliance, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms; and the need for direct dialogue in regional security forums. Suggestions for coercive approaches include creating mechanisms to guarantee compliance and enforcement.



### Means of Delivery: A complex and Evolving issue in the Middle East WMD-Free Zone Initiative

The inclusion of means of delivery of WMD in the scope of the ME WMDFZ is a polarizing question among regional states. This paper examines the history of means of delivery in the context of the Zone, assesses the regional perspectives and related concerns, and presents several policy options for states to consider. Key findings of the publication include that: (i) regional states have yet to thoroughly explore the issue; (ii) the rapidly changing technological developments and evolving regional dynamics may further complicate addressing means of delivery but may also lead to a watershed moment with a push to address the issue more concertedly given growing concerns with conventional systems; (iii) the proliferation of delivery systems in the region stems from multifaceted threat perceptions and is linked with security dilemmas and conflicts, thus states will need to be convinced that the adoption of controls on delivery systems contributes to their national security without undermining it and; (iv) though it is up to regional states to consider the viability of different options moving forward, the arms control community could offer guidance on the parameters, viability, and feasibility of any such explorations.



### Examining Modalities for Nuclear Disarmament in the Middle East WMD-Free Zone Treaty

The paper addresses the complexities associated with nuclear disarmament in the absence of an internationally accepted multilateral framework. The paper sketches out and examines the implications of two primary pathways to achieve nuclear disarmament in a future ME WMDFZ treaty: disarmament as a precondition for joining the treaty, and the inclusion of specific disarmament provisions in the zone treaty. The paper analyzes the advantages and limitations of existing frameworks such as the NPT, CWC, TPNW, and the Treaty of Pelindaba. States of the Middle East will have to consider various factors when choosing which approach to take: What is desirable (the levels of information, transparency, and resulting assurance of the completeness and irreversibility of a state’s nuclear weapon programme that they would deem sufficient to allay their concerns); What is applicable (the impact of each pathway on the complexity and time frame of the negotiation of the treaty and on its entry into force, and what is feasible (a pathway that is compatible with the desired level of assurance as well as being politically and technically feasible).



### The Consultations in Glicon and Geneva: A View from the Negotiating Table

This paper series offers a valuable collection of perspectives from key negotiators and convenors of the Glicon and Geneva consultations (2013-2014) to convene a ME WMDFZ Conference, which had been mandated by the 2010 NPT RevCon. The six negotiators share insights, and offer lessons learned, previously undocumented personal accounts of the events and discussions, and behind-the-scenes dynamics of the ME WMDFZ conference consultations process. The series also includes a [timeline](#) of relevant events that occurred between 2010-2015 with links to original documents from the consultations. Though each reflection has its unique lessons about the consultations, some authors commonly noted that: (i) the prolonged period of choosing a Facilitator hindered the consultations; (ii) regional engagement in the Glicon/ Geneva consultations format was a feat in itself, the first time since ACRS in the 1990s where Arab delegations, Iran, and Israel engaged on the topic; (iii) the consultations were civil and there was some willingness between regional states to find a compromise where possible; (iv) the mandate of a ME WMDFZ conference, the question whether to discuss regional security and the role of the UN remained key issues where compromise was not achieved; (v) it was important to have consistent and high-level buy-in and representation in the consultations and; (vi) dialogue is an essential ingredient for progress.



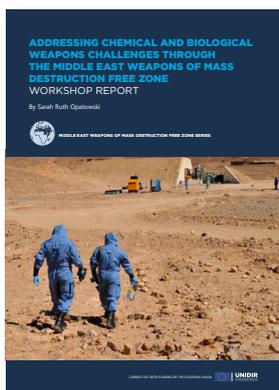
## Development and Cooperation on Nuclear Research and Energy in the Middle East – Workshop Report

The workshop and its report focus on exploring the potential for development and cooperation in nuclear research and energy within the Middle East in the context of a ME WMDFZ. The report provides an overview of the current status of nuclear research and energy programmes in the Middle East; reviews existing mechanisms for regional cooperation on nuclear research and energy; identifies potential areas for cooperation in nuclear safety and security, and offers insights on these in the context of a ME WMDFZ. On the national level, workshop participants discussed their respective nuclear energy programmes, provided details about their objectives, progress, technologies under consideration, as well as organizational aspects. Common challenges noted were public acceptance and building national capacities. On the regional level, participants identified mutual interest in investment in education, creating employment opportunities, and addressing potential threat emanating from non-state actors to these programs. Participants highlighted also opportunities for cooperation in nuclear safety; emergency prevention, preparedness and response; human resources development; scientific collaboration, and development and deployment of small modular reactors.



## Narratives on the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone: Historical Accounts, Drivers, and Themes

The publication documents the narratives of key stakeholders, including the Arab states, Iran, Israel, Russia, and the United States, and their involvement in Zone-related processes at various critical junctures since 1974. By distilling insights from these narratives, the study uncovers the key drivers and themes that shape the behaviour of these states toward the ME WMDFZ. It offers a comprehensive historical account of key Zone-related processes and events from all these keyholders perspectives. The study primarily draws on information gathered through more than 80 interviews with current and former officials, as well as experts from more than 20 states in addition to regional and international organizations that have played important roles in the Zone processes. The narratives shed light on how historical events have been perceived and interpreted by different stakeholders, revealing their divergent motivations, objectives, and perceptions assigned to other stakeholders, emphasizing the complexity and multifaceted nature of the ME WMDFZ. The diverse perspectives provided in this publication could assist in bridging gaps between Middle Eastern states, uncovering points of convergence, divergence, and misunderstanding.



## Addressing Chemical and Biological Weapons Challenges through the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone

The report captures the discussions held during the UNIDIR workshop on chemical and biological weapons in the Middle East, shedding light on important considerations of addressing these weapons in the context of the establishment of ME WMDFZ. The workshop highlighted several key takeaways, emphasizing the importance of effective verification mechanisms to maintain trust in compliance, regional cooperation, and clarity on the scope and mandate of the zone. Regarding chemical weapons, participants emphasized the OPCW's verification capabilities, highlighted its various programs to promote implementation of the CWC or other regional tailored arrangements. Participants also expressed concerns regarding regional adherence to and compliance with compliance with the CWC, and threats from non-state actors as well as options for including a complementary regional verification arrangement. On biological weapons, experts noted the challenge of verifying compliance due to lack of an international verification mechanism and advancements in science and technology that complicate the task of achieving a verifiable biological weapons free zone. Confidence-building measures were discussed as a mechanism to facilitate information exchange and reduce mistrust, while recognizing that they do not replace an effective verification. Participants from the region emphasized the need for governments to prioritize non-proliferation and allocate necessary funding for biosafety and biosecurity measures.

# ANNEX 3

## ENGAGEMENT METRICS

### PUBLICATIONS & EVENTS



**15** publications  
**4** languages  
 (English, Arabic,  
 Hebrew, Persian)



**10** external  
 articles



**7,647** publication  
 downloads from  
**75** countries and  
 territories (not including  
 direct links to PDFs)

### TWITTER



**260K** total  
 impressions



**6,979**  
 engagements

### WEBSITE TRAFFIC



**197,757**  
 visits to  
 project  
 pages



**10,080**  
 users



**157** countries  
 accessed/  
 downloaded  
 from



**14,624** searches  
 on the Document  
 Depository



**52,540** visits to  
 the ME WMDFZ  
 Timeline

### TOP REFERRAL SITES

- |                         |                             |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Brookings            | 6. reachingcriticalwill.org |
| 2. LinkedIn             | 7. vcdnp.org                |
| 3. nonproliferation.eu  | 8. geneve-int.ch            |
| 4. Youtube              | 9. yandex.ru                |
| 5. nonproliferation.org | 10. thebulletin.org         |

### COUNTRY ENGAGEMENT

Website traffic



\* Figures as of 1 June 2023

# MIDDLE EAST WMD-FREE ZONE PROJECT

## FINAL REPORT

The urgent need for a weapon-of-mass destruction-free zone in the Middle East is increasingly evident, yet progress towards its establishment remains limited. Despite numerous resolutions in international forums and widespread support for the initiative, deep divisions among regional actors about its objectives and how to pursue them, alongside a lack of trust, have hindered progress. To address this challenging landscape, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), with the support of the European Union, launched a comprehensive project in August 2019. The project examined the historical context, perspectives, and prospects for a ME WMDFZ through research, dialogue, and capacity building. This report offers a summary of the project's activities and outputs, presenting key takeaways and proposals to advance the ME WMDFZ initiative. It provides insights into the evolution of the issue over time, drawing lessons for current and future efforts.