

Report

Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Middle East (CSCME) Civil Society Initiative Workshop “Towards the 2012 Conference on a Nuclear and WMD-Free Zone in Middle East” London, 25–26 October 2011

+ Annex, 26 December 2012

The two-day workshop was prepared and facilitated by the Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Middle East (CSCME) Common Security Working Group, led by Palestine-Israel Journal Co-Editor Hillel Schenker, in cooperation with the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy (CISD) at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London, led by CISD Director Dr. Dan Plesch. The workshop was connected to a conference at SOAS on the same subject held on 24 October 2011, the 6th SOAS/British Pugwash London Conference on a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone. Its first panel discussion on the subject »The Road to Regional Security and Cooperation in the Middle East« assembled CSCME Common Security Working Group members Palestine-Israel Journal Co-Editors Ziad AbuZayyad and Hillel Schenker, Jordanian Gen. (rtd.) Mohammad K. Shiyab and German-Iranian Prof. Mohssen Massarrat and was chaired by German-Iranian Ali Fathollah-Nejad, a doctoral student at SOAS. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation kindly sponsored the project. The two-day workshop assembled 21 participants from Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Turkey, Germany, the USA and the United Kingdom.

The focus of the above-mentioned SOAS conference was an analysis of the historical background of the international Middle East WMD-Free Zone (ME-WMDFZ) Conference that was mandated by the conclusions of the NPT Review Conference in May 2010 in New York. Earlier in October 2011, the four parties responsible for finding a facilitator and host for the conference – the governments of the U.S., UK and Russia, together with the UN Secretary General – had designated Finland to be the facilitator and host for the conference. Finnish Under-Secretary of State Jaakko Laajava was named the facilitator and entered into negotiations with all of the regional parties to be invited to the conference, which according to the original resolution was supposed to take place in the course of 2012.

A member of the Finnish mission to London observed the two-day CSCME workshop, and reported on its proceedings back to the facilitator.

Complementing the SOAS conference, the workshop sessions discussed both perspectives for the Helsinki international conference and tasks of civil society in the Middle East, particularly how the CSCME initiative could support the realization of the international conference on a ME WMDFZ. What follows are the results of the discussions held during the workshop sessions.

Workshop 1: 25 October 2011, 9.15 – 11.00 h

The Impact of the Arab Spring and the Role of the Arab Peace Initiative in Laying the Foundation for the 2012 Conference

The “Arab Spring” initially strengthened civil society in the respective countries and demonstrated its potential power vis-à-vis state authorities. However, for the present time, economic and social problems and their resolution are at the top of the agenda in all of the countries in the Middle East, as well as a struggle for power between political Islam and more secular forces.

This applies to Israel, too. In the mass social protest movement that began in the summer of 2011, discussions about security have not played an important role. As to the intrinsic connection between growing social problems and the traditional model of a confrontative, very expensive security policy, Israel's new social movement has not yet really become aware of it and put it on its agenda. But its peace movement is working on improving it.

Traditional Arab foreign policies led by Egypt and the Arab League advocating the creation of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East remain in force.

Another major factor is the Arab Peace Initiative (API), launched at the Arab League Summit Conference in Beirut (2002), endorsed by 57 Islamic countries (including the Arab countries) in the Organization of Islamic Conference meeting in Tehran, May 2003, and ever since reaffirmed at summit conferences in Riyadh (2007) and Baghdad (2012), the latter being held after the regime transformations brought about by the Arab Spring. The API, which expresses an Arab World readiness to recognize Israel and have normal relations with it, based upon the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and an agreed-upon resolution of the refugee and Jerusalem questions, can serve as the basis for an Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab peace conference. It can also serve as a basis for moving forward toward a nuclear- and WMD-free zone, and the creation of a new security and cooperation regime in the Middle East.

It should also be noted that the changes brought about by the Arab Spring have not challenged the existence of the Israeli-Egyptian and Israeli-Jordanian peace treaties, though they have brought the general Arab public's desire to see an end to the occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state to the fore. Calls to revisit these treaties, and not to abolish them, are actually an evidence of accepting them but trying to adjust them to the new realities created by the Arab Spring.

Workshop 2: 25 October 2011, 11.30 – 13.30 h

The Role of Israel and Iran in the Potential Success of the 2012 Conference

In both Israel and Iran, there has virtually been no public debate or awareness of the (originally planned) Helsinki 2012 Middle East WMDFZ Conference. Whether Israel will take part in it remains to be seen. While regarding Iran the expectation was voiced that the country will be ready to take part. Iran could then seize the opportunity to present its views on an international platform.

Unfortunately, at present it is not possible for representatives of Iranian civil society to engage in a public dialogue with representatives of Israeli civil society. They can only do so at closed conferences such as this two- day workshop, based upon the Chatham House Rule with no public attribution allowed. However, such encounters should be encouraged and continued. The possibility of public encounters between members of the Iranian Diaspora and Israelis should also be explored, such as encounters between Israeli and Iranian filmmakers, etc.

There is a general perception that for the Helsinki conference to succeed, it is absolutely essential that both Iran and Israel be at the table.

Workshop 3: 25 October 2011, 15.00 – 17.00 h

After Fukushima: The Place of Nuclear Energy Programs in the Middle East and Their Potential Impact on the Nuclearization of the Region

Nuclearization of the region began in the 1950s with the beginning of Israel's nuclear program and the eventual production of nuclear weapons at the Dimona site. Israel has never officially declared that it has nuclear weapons, but the estimation is that it has between 70-200 nuclear warheads. Although Dimona is only a small reactor where about 70 MW have

been installed, in a worst-case scenario the consequences of an accident or an attack on the facility for the entire country and the region would be catastrophic.

In Iran, a large reactor has been built in Bushehr (others are planned) which is officially destined to generate electricity. However, the surrounding infrastructure at Bushehr allows for speculation about the fact that Iran's nuclear program might have a military dimension. There is no proof of the production of nuclear weapons, but the projected installations are constructed in a way that upon completion of the current nuclear program, Iran could in fact build a nuclear weapon within a few weeks. Japan, Germany and Brazil, for example, possess the capability to build nuclear weapons within seven weeks only. It may be the case that Iran seeks to acquire similar capacities and capabilities (a so-called "nuclear-weapons capability"). However, it is questionable whether Iran can reach this goal, given the fact that its nuclear installations, in contrast to most other ones in the world, were built with elements from different designs (German, Russian, Chinese, and Pakistani) and are therefore highly fragile. For instance, currently only 60 MW of the Bushehr Reactor can be used for electricity generation, even though the facility's output is designed for 1,000 MW.

In other Middle Eastern countries, there are plans for the construction of nuclear power plants, as in the cases of Turkey (2 reactors planned) and Saudi Arabia (14 reactors planned). After the Fukushima catastrophe, the Turkish government has temporarily shelved its plans, but has not given them up. In Jordan, nuclearization is limited to uranium mining. There, it has been considered that uranium mining be complemented by enrichment facilities. There are also plans in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf and in Yemen for the construction of nuclear power plants.

It was stressed that all those projects are hardly justifiable from an economic point of view. For medical and agricultural purposes, a research reactor suffices.

Another presentation pointed to the fact that the nuclearization of the Middle East (as well as of the rest of the world) is fostered by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) itself: Its Article IV explicitly guarantees support to all signatory countries for developing civilian nuclear programs as a compensation for abstaining from nuclear weapons. This ignores the problem that civilian and military nuclear programs are hardly separable, and that civilian nuclear programs are the basis for nearly all military programs in the world. Therefore, the question was raised if this issue should be addressed when preparing for the Helsinki conference. In the same presentation it was pointed to the example of Germany: showing that a leading industrial nation has decided to abstain from nuclear energy because it sees its future in generating energy from renewable resources.

Workshop 4: 26 October 2011, 9.00 – 11.00 h

The Role of Civil Society: Review of Relevant Research Centers in the Middle East that are Dealing with Arms Control and WMD Non-Proliferation and Nature of Public Debate on the Topic in Respective Countries

The situation across the region is very different depending on the country in question. In Turkey, for instance, some people and groups are dealing with the whole complex of arms control and a WMD/FZ. Information about those activities are however being monopolized by the government. There are no public debates on these issues although a number of meetings on them have been held.

In Israel, there are only a few research centers that focus on questions of arms control and nuclear policy. Public debate, in the media or in society, is virtually non-existent, though op-ed articles appear periodically in the press. Even in civil society, including the peace movement, the nuclear question appears to be almost taboo, due to self-censorship. The explanation for this is usually that the topic is complicated, people don't have enough knowledge to express opinions, nuclear policy should be left to the security and government

experts, and the main focus is on issues connected to the conventional Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In Palestine, there are only a few individuals interested in arms control and nuclear questions. The issue of the need to confront the occupation – understandably – overshadows all other topics.

In Jordan, questions related to security are dealt with at the Middle East Study Center (www.mesc.com.jo). Moreover, there are only a few academic experts who are dealing with issues of security policy at the university and research institute level.

In Iran, security issues and questions related to nuclear policy are very intensely discussed by government circles only, i.e. behind closed doors. Politically, the Supreme Leader is in charge of nuclear policy, not the president. However, there are a few political scientists at universities who address the topic in their courses.

Workshop 5: 26 October 2011, 11.30 – 13.30 h

Concrete Steps on the Road to the 2012 Conference

In this session, concrete steps in various directions were debated:

- a) *Steps by civil society towards the Helsinki governmental international ME-WMD/FZ Conference.* A number of suggestions were made, most notably decentralized activities (e.g. press conferences), to be organized every three months from January 2012 onwards. Furthermore, it was proposed that an information campaign, run by civil society organizations, on the significance of the Helsinki Conference be launched in countries of the region (where possible).
- b) *Concrete steps towards a Civil-Society CSCME ME-WMD/FZ Conference.* A proposal by Christoph Kraemer und Mohssen Massarrat was handed out (attached to this report).
- c) *Ways of ensuring success of the Helsinki conference.* The previous attempt to promote a regional security regime at the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Talks between 1992 and 1995 broke down primarily because of the disagreement over which comes first – a nuclear-free zone (Egypt) or Israeli-Arab comprehensive peace (Israel). It was proposed that the way to go beyond the deadlock was to cultivate two parallel tracks: One moving towards a nuclear- and WMD- free zone, and the other moving towards Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab comprehensive peace.
- d) *Location for a Civil-Society CSCME ME-WMD/FZ Conference to be held in 2012 or 2013.* As potential host cities in the region, Cairo, Amman, Beirut, and Istanbul (or Ankara) were mentioned. However, it was noted that Israelis would not be allowed to participate in Beirut, and in the current post-Arab Spring circumstances, both Cairo and Amman might also be problematic. The political conditions are considered best in Turkey, where infrastructure and local resources are also adequately provided. Jonathan Levack (TESEV) und Sinan Ülgen (EDAM) have both shared this assessment and have kindly declared their willingness to act as contact persons for the coordination of the next steps. Another possibility would be to hold the Civil Society CSCME ME-WMD/FZ Conference in a third-party European country, such as Germany, the UK, Greece, Spain, Austria, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Italy or Cyprus.

Post-Workshop Proposition by Mohssen Massarrat

We should soon establish contacts with Arab TV channels, such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, in order to gain their support for both the Helsinki Conference and a desirable additional civil society CSCME ME-WMDFZ conference.

Further Comments in December 2012

We now know that the Helsinki Conference on a Nuclear and Mass Destruction Weapons Free Zone has been postponed, and will not be held in 2012. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has reaffirmed his commitment, “together with the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States, in consultation with the States of the region, to convene a conference, to be attended by all States of the Middle East, on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction,” and it should take place “at the earliest opportunity in 2013.”

The CSCME initiative is one of the major initiatives that has convened representatives of civil society from the Middle East and adjacent countries in recent years. Its discussions and workshops have provided constructive input to the Helsinki conference process, and it has set in motion a dynamic for establishing civil-society guidelines for a new Middle Eastern regime for peace and cooperation, which will include a nuclear- and WMD- free zone. The network of civil society activists and stakeholders created by the CSCME initiative will continue to help lay the foundations for a different Middle Eastern security regime, based upon cooperation and peace.

This report has been compiled by:

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The workshop was held under the Chatham House Rule.

Attachments:

- list of the participants (with biodata)
- draft concept: CSCME-based Civil Society WMDFZ Conference in Middle East