

Is there a Disarmament Deficit as a Result of the NPT Conference 2015?

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The recent NPT Review Conference (REVCON) was the 9th since the NPT came into force in 1970 and the 4th since the Treaty's indefinite extension was initiated in 1995. The 1995, 2000 and 2010 conferences can be described as the main turning points in terms of making progress on the NPT Treaty. Today, the IR community is divided on the success or failure of the 2015 NPT REVCON from the standpoint of disarmament in general and from the WMD Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East in particular. This is because the 2015 REVCON failed to produce a consensus document by the end of the conference. The main purpose of this analysis is to reach a conclusion about the future of disarmament efforts (including the WMDFZ in the Middle East and others) by taking into account the main outcome of the 2015 NPT in comparison with the REVCONs of 1995, 2000 and 2010.

The NPT Review Conference of 2015

On 22 May 2015 the NPT REVCON in New York ended without reaching a consensus on the process for convening a long awaited conference on a WMDFZ in the Middle East¹ due to the appearance of differences between Egypt and Isra-



el. Hence, the parties to the NPT had by the end of the conference failed to produce an up-dated and meaningful action plan on disarmament that would build upon on the commitment towards nuclear disarmament. At the 2000 REVCON meeting, nuclear weapon states (NWS) promised (i) to reduce their nuclear efforts by undertaking unilateral efforts (ii) to pursue the reduction of non-strategic nuclear arsenals (iii) to diminish the role of nuclear weapons in security policies and (iv) to engage in further negotiations on nuclear weapons reduction and nuclear disarmament.² Under today's conditions, especially after the 2015 NPT REVCON, the NWS do not seem to be willing and ready to fulfill these commitments. This mood could be partially explained by the present volatile conditions in the Middle East and the Ukrainian crisis, as well as the continuous stand-off between the major leading powers in Asia. Major impediments in this re-

1 "Disarmament Deficit", *Arms Control Today*, 1 June 2015, http://www.armscontrol.org/ACT/2015_06/Focus/The-Disarmaent-Deficit, last visited on 11 June 2015.

2 Vladimir Orlov, "What Future for he NPT?"; *Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security*, No-108-109. Vol. 20, 23 January 2015, pp.37-55.

gard can be found in declarations made by the NWS officials. For instance, US Secretary of State John Kerry in June 2013 put forward a US proposal for initiating talks with Russia on further reducing their strategic nuclear arsenals by a third. In response, the Russian delegation made clear that they had already made the maximum reduction in their arsenal and therefore rejected the US proposal. Moscow also has not refrained from arguing that it is the US policy of building up a global missile defense system that has prevented Russia making further progress in this regard. The US and Russia are not alone amongst the five nuclear states in the process of modernizing their nuclear arsenals. China has also continued to expand its nuclear arsenal, deploying multi-warheads on its intercontinental ballistic missiles.³

In the aftermath of the 2015 REVCON, both the US and the Russian Federation have failed to meet their promised follow-up on new START Treaty commitments, which included making further reductions in non-strategic arms. Moreover, the NWS failed to take action against the forced entry of the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) during the 2015 REVCON.

Hostile relations between the US and Russia, together with the growing uneasiness in the relations between US and China are inhibiting progress in the field of disarmament. This however cannot be a legitimate excuse for the NWS abstaining from their liabilities as stated under Article 6 of NPT clause. Despite the existence of a NPT consensus during the 2000 and 2010 conferences in terms of a clear road map for disarmament, as yet no substantial progress has been

made. Due to the increasing insecurity in global conditions, the NWS seem to be more inclined towards a program of nuclear deterrence needs/mechanisms by retaining modernized nuclear capabilities in preference to universal disarmament requirements. The latest American, Russian and Chinese security documents as well as the new nuclear modernization efforts are clear evidence in this regard. At the end of the latest REVCON when the five NWS stated that the pursuit of disarmament must be made incrementally (which they emphasized requires time and favorable conditions), they were making clear that these five states were not yet ready to take crucial steps in reducing their nuclear arsenal.

The Future of the Middle East WMD-Free Zone

On 22 May 2015, the NPT Review Conference finished without adopting a proposed plan of action for a MWDFZ of the Middle East. This resulted from the US decision, with backing from the UK and Canada, to provide no support for an Egyptian/Arab proposal favored by a large number of the NPT members. Since the 1995 resolution, which aimed to extend the NPT treaty indefinitely, the aim of freeing the Middle East from WMD and their delivery has functioned as its central pillar. The failure of the 2015 NPT REVCON has naturally left the International community with a number of questions concerning the future of the global non-proliferation regime in general and the NPT's future in particular.

The indefinite extension of the NPT Treaty in 1995 could not have been achieved without pleas from non-nuclear states to realize the Resolution of 1995, mandating the liberation of the

³ "Disarmament Deficit..." *ibid.*

Middle East from all WMD arsenals. The failure to meet the mandate of the NPR REVCON of 2010, which made the convening of WMDFZ by 2012 a necessary condition, has naturally angered most of the non-nuclear Arab states. This recalls an earlier incident in 2005, due to the Egyptian and Arab states frustration with the three nuclear weapon state sponsors over the lack of progress in implementing the 1995 Resolution, and their resulting skepticism over the lack of commitment, the 2005 NPT REVCON collapsed.⁴

Furthermore, prior to convening the 2010 NPT REVCON, the Arab states and especially Egypt made it clear that if the zone issue ensuing from the 1995 Resolution were again to be ignored, the consequences would be unbearable for the future of NPT. The attitude of the Arab states on this occasion seemed to have assured the rest of the NPT states as well as the conveners of the NPT Treaty, so much so that the 2010 mandate to establish a WMDFZ of the Middle East became a reality of the 2010 REVCON.

If a WMDFZ of the Middle East is realized, it will be the first and only example of its kind. Unlike the previous existing nuclear-free zones, this will involve a ban on chemical and biological weapons along with their means of delivery. This means that firstly, the locations of this zone would have to be negotiated along with the sites where the programs are suspected to have been

4 Bernd W. Kubbig and Christian Weidlich, A WMD/DVs Free Zone for the Middle East: Taking Stock, Moving Forward Towards Cooperative Security, *Academic Peace Orchestra Middle East: Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF)*, Frankfurt, 2015, pp. 13-14.

developed. Secondly, there exists no verification system applicable for the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). Thirdly, due to existing historic enmities amongst some of the potential zone countries a security dilemma exists and finally, the Iranian nuclear deal that has recently become a new factor needs to be taken into account alongside the Syrian crisis, in terms of its likely effects on the planned zone. Moreover, the use of chemical weapons during the civil war in Syria has once again highlighted that their use in the Middle East is not a taboo.⁵ This reality very clearly necessitates how much the Middle East is in urgent need of mechanisms like the WMDFZ that would guarantee regional efforts towards chemical weapons disarmament.

The goal of a MEWMDFZ and the challenge of its delivery is not a new phenomenon and one that dates back to 1974. What is important is that the idea enjoys the acceptance of almost all of the states in the Middle East. However, these states differ as to manner in which the goal can be achieved and its consequences. The major impediment to the initiative seems to be the peace first versus disarmament argument supported by Egypt and Israel. Today, these two states continue to stay loyal to their arguments although due to the unfolding events both at the regional and global levels, especially post the 2010 NPT REVCON, there seems to be some change in their tactics. After the Iranian foreign minister Zarif's appearance at the 2015 NPT REVCON, there is the possibility of a new strategic triangle involving Israel, Egypt and Iran in the future calculus of WMD disarmament. The recent NPT REVCON which concluded with the rejection

5 *Ibid.*

of the Egyptian/Arab proposal seems to favor Israel's current expectations, although, the debate over a future of WMDFZ far from over. Moreover, this issue does not seem to be confined to Israel and Egypt. Egypt's frustration is borne over the failure of the previous decision to convene 2012 NPT Conference on the WMDFZ proposed at the 2015 NPT REVCON rather than following the Helsinki process which imposed a fresh approach on the UN secretary general to convene the Middle East NWFZ conference within 180 days, meaning no later March 2016. In the face of this Egyptian insistence, the US with support from Canada and the UK rejected Cairo's proposal by accusing unnamed parties of trying to manipulate the WMDFZ Conference with an insistence on a March 2016 deadline for holding a preparatory conference. This rejection was seen by Israeli delegation as a success for itself. No doubt, prior to convening the 2015 NPT REVCON, Israel changed its strategy. The Tel-Aviv government, by sending a delegation to REVCON and presenting a paper at the conference hoped to have a voice in proceedings. Israel aimed to both avoid the possibility of being singled out in the conference as well as successfully persuading Washington of its positive manner and cooperative intent. Although in the aftermath of the REVCON, Israel has been successful in meeting her objectives, in the near future Tel Aviv may become obliged to take into account the new Iranian factor especially after the signing of a nuclear deal between the P5+1 and Tehran. If Iran can assure the international community that it is a reliable state and member of the NPT, Tehran could speed up the diplomatic process on the regional disarmament process. If this becomes a reality, there is a high likeliho-

od that Israel might become obliged to re-set or at least review its past/present and future regional disarmament strategies, including the long corridor doctrine.⁶

Conclusion

Up until now, serious developments in the Middle East and the Gulf have overshadowed the previous search for responses to fundamental security challenges related to ridding the Middle East of WMD weapons and the problem of the steps required in organizing a successful conference on the WMDFZ. Under the present conditions, the need for such a conference does not rest there. The residual issues from unresolved conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian tract and others along with newly developing issues, both in the form of traditional and non-traditional security threats are in need of immediate answers. Currently, the weakening of states like Syria and others and the rise of the new non-state actors such as radical jihadist groups with their attempts at acquiring illicit weaponry together certainly is making the efforts of disarmament initiative a quite difficult job. Another impediment to solving the proliferation of the WMD arsenal and the delivery systems in the Middle East is associated with the absence of a comprehensive regional security mechanism or a forum. Furthermore, the present chill in relations between the Russian Federation and the Euro-Atlantic world is also making the aim of disarmament in the Middle East and beyond almost impossible. In the early post-Cold War period, the contours of previous relationships between the five nucle-

6 Shemuel Meir, "Whither the Proposed Middle East Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone?", 14 June 2015, <http://www.lobelog.com/whither-the-proposed-middle-east-nuclear-weapons-free-zone/>, last visited on 22 June 2015.

ar states were relatively peaceful. This situation has now drastically changed and is becoming a major hindrance to any efforts at improving disarmament efforts. However, as the Finish facilitator Laajava has stated, the world we live in today is in immediate need of answers to problems of a global nature and this requires all states and regions to engage in peaceful cooperation due to global interconnectedness and mutual interdependence.⁷ Currently, the Middle East, due to unfolding hard and soft security issues, has already moved away from a cooperative security mindset to a balance of power mindset, especially after the post-Arab spring counter-revolutions and continuous civil war in Middle Eastern states. The increasing distrust amongst the actors of the Middle East feeds existing security dilemmas and works against the disarmament efforts being launched in the region.

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⁷ “WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East: Obstacles and Opportunities”, *Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security*, No-108-109. Vol. 20, 23 January 2015, pp.51-56.

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