

“The Middle East Free Zone: A Challenging Reality”

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Nuclear Security in the Middle East

“Baroness Henriette van Lynden lecture”

March 20, 2014

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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1- Introduction:

I would like to thank you for inviting me today to speak in my personal and academic capacity to reflect some of my views on how to move forward with the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. I believe that the topic of nuclear weapon free zones is of utmost importance, even more so given the transformative changes underway in the political landscape of the Middle East.

It is important that we do not underestimate the level of frustration that has built up around this issue, and that it is important to the health of the non-proliferation regime that confidence is restored in the process. This will require all of us to approach the issue in a manner that respects the principle of equal commitment to regional and global security, and the creation of a regime that at root and in the longer term is non-discriminatory.

In my brief comments, I intend to address several issues namely the Arab spring and the changes in the region, Potential Steps to build a WMD-Free Zone, Technical Challenges and Risks to the Zone Process, Technical Provisions necessary to achieve nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in the Middle East, and will finally leave you with some conclusions and key points regarding the possible future of the zone.

2- The Arab Spring and the Middle East Free Zone:

1. The Arab Spring launched an era of sweeping political changes in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. The people's rising demands for a stronger voice in their own governance have brought new opportunities for reform and democratic transition giving rise to new fundamental changes in political rights and civil liberties.
2. The "Arab Spring" has without a doubt changed existing fundamental dynamics and has had significant implications on the political and security settings in the Middle East. Public opinion is already playing a much more significant and prominent role in Arab societies and

in this respect, will have a fundamental role in the formulation of disarmament and security issues. Arab governments are becoming more accountable to their people and foreign policy is becoming more in line with domestic aspirations and a reflection of popular demands. Parliaments, with their foreign affairs, Arab affairs and National Security committees, are expected to play an increasing role in foreign policy issues in Egypt, in which nuclear issues will receive, without a doubt, considerable attention.

3. It is in this context, the establishment of a zone can positively contribute to regional and international non-proliferation and disarmament efforts as well as improving the overall security environment in the Middle East. The convening of the conference on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, as soon as possible, is integral to the future stability of the region. The success of the Middle East Free Zone Conference will also be crucial to the success of the current NPT Review Cycle and its outcome will certainly have a significant bearing on future developments in the Middle East. Holding the Middle East Conference is thus of crucial importance, and any further delay in convening it would have serious repercussions on the NPT regime as a whole.
4. The Middle East remains a highly volatile region troubled with protracted conflicts. The acquisition by states of nuclear weapons, and WMD's at large, undoubtedly contributes to greater instability, aggravates tensions, and leads to an accelerated arms race in the region. It is imperative therefore; that the Middle East follows other regional examples and completes the implementation of existing regional nuclear weapon free zones and work actively to establish such a zone given the exceptional challenges this region brings to global stability.
5. In our attempts to provide a framework for a NWFZ in the Middle East, it would be beneficial then to reflect on the treaties of other regional nuclear weapon free zones such as the

Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, Pelindaba, and Bangkok Treaties. Despite the contextual differences between these zones and the Middle East, these treaties nevertheless can provide us with guidance when it comes to formulating the technical, institutional, and scientific dimensions related to a weapon free zone.

3- Potential Steps and Opportunities to build a WMD-Free Zone:

1. A more constructive approach towards engaging with all the countries of the region is required in order to guarantee their full participation in the ME Free Zone Conference. I believe that the ME Free Zone Conference and the process that follows should be inclusive to allow a more genuine, candid and necessary interaction about nuclear disarmament, dismantlement, nuclear roll-back, transparency, accountability, and verification. The region has not witnessed such interaction for many years and all opportunities should be utilized to bring such interaction to fruition. All states, including Israel and Iran, should be convinced that their long-term security interests call for a WMD-free zone.
2. Regional parties should enter directly into a phase of substantive and procedural preparation for the Middle East WDMFZ conference as soon as possible. Conference coordinators should invite Israel and Iran, along with the League of Arab States, to finalize a process of agreeing on a conference agenda. There must be a commitment by all relevant states to attend.
3. The conference should then launch a sustained and serious process involving concrete steps with specified timeframes. Each NPT Preparatory Committee and Review Conference should subsequently evaluate the process and reference it in outcome documents.

4. Addressing the scientific and technical dimension of the WMDFZ proposal – including institutional and legal issues – can help breaking the current stalemate in the diplomatic negotiations and make substantial progress toward the end-goal of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means.
5. To facilitate the process, all relevant international nonproliferation treaties and organizations, such as IAEA, CTBTO, NPT, UNODA, OPCW and BWC Implementation Unit should be called upon to begin a collective awareness and outreach program for the relevant cadres from the region. Again, this program should aim at addressing the main technical, institutional and legal issues related to the establishment of the free-zone.
6. The IAEA is bound to play a key role as the body responsible for effectively verifying that no nuclear materials are diverted into illegal weapons programs and that all parties have irreversibly dismantled and destructed all nuclear devices manufactured prior to the entry into force of the free-zone treaty, as would be true in the Israeli case.

4: Technical Challenges and Risks to the Zone Process

In advance of the conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone, there is substantial agreement between States on such issues as the geographic scope of the zone, and the inclusion of substantive agenda items such as verification and compliance. However, in view of items raised previously, a range of additional crucial issues are still pending for discussion by the region's States. Key questions remain, including:

1. Which institutions will be entrusted with the responsibility of the zone?

2. What are the implications of non-compliance? (The Euratom treaty may be a useful example here as there is a process to deal with violations: depending on the severity of the violation. There is a range of options that the Euratom Commission can decide: from sending a warning to actually taking all the fissile materials out of a facility).
3. How can security guarantees be given to reinforce the process of the zone's establishment?
4. What role will the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, as well as nuclear safety and security, play in future zone discussions?

5. Moreover, the following technical provisions need to be considered in order to achieve nuclear disarmament and non- proliferation in the Middle East:

1. Dismantling and destroying existing or remaining nuclear weapons capabilities, facilities, and devices under international verification mechanisms;
2. Renouncing nuclear weapons through refraining from conducting indigenous development and activities related to nuclear weapons;
3. Prohibiting the transit or stationing of any nuclear explosive devices in the zone;
4. Prohibiting nuclear explosive testing in the zone and the role of the CTBTO;
5. Using nuclear materials and facilities for peaceful purposes only;
6. Placing all nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards;
7. Establishing the necessary relevant institutions and mechanisms or entities to uphold a zone, free of nuclear and other WMDs;

8. Addressing the issue of verification, including identifying the role of the IAEA and other relevant organizations such as the OPCW and CTBTO.

6. Conclusion and Key Points:

1. The establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East remains crucial despite the failure to convene a conference on this initiative as mandated within the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Cycle.
2. This project has taken a new dimension after the Arab Spring because, as a result, civil society and parliaments are likely to play an increasing role in foreign and security policy issues and may press their governments for more progress in this field.
3. The experience of other regions in establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones will be useful to set up a similar zone in the Middle East, including in its technical dimensions and verification mechanisms.
4. In order to make progress towards a such zone in the Middle East, the convenors of the planned conference should engage Israel, Iran and the Arab League in substantive and procedural preparations to launch a negotiating zonal conference cycle.
5. Progress towards this goal would be reported to the NPT Review Cycle conferences, and would require the contribution of international organisations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) or the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).
6. The process to build the zone is a reality that has potentials, but with several challenges as well. However, the zone will definitely enhance international security, peace and

stability, and promote regional security and cooperation. Moreover, It will facilitate regional cooperation on issues of common interest, including emerging security challenges.

Thank you!