

THE ZONE, FUEL CYCLE AND MULTILATERAL VERIFICATION MEASURES

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Cooperation on highly sensitive matters, such as energy supplies and arms control, always entails a level of risk for those who take part in it.

A WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East would not be different, and for such a project to achieve concrete success it is necessary to assess these risks and find ways to contain them. Risk is traditionally described as a factor of the probability a certain hazard comes through and the consequences of said hazard.

In my presentation, I will talk about the ways to address these risks through multilateral verification. More specifically, I will focus on nuclear proliferation and nuclear-related verification.

One of the most relevant risks that a regional arms control settlement entails is that at a certain point in the future, one of the countries of the region might rearm itself with weapons of mass destruction, and be able to threaten its neighbours with them.

Clearly, the consequences of this scenario would be extremely serious, and military planners have to take this into account, as they deal with future uncertainty. Even a small perceived probability of this happening might be enough to convince states in the region to not join the Zone, and potentially to maintain latent WMD capabilities. The best way, arguably, to both assess and contain the probability that such a scenario would come true, is to introduce a solid verification regime. In essence, Verification can be described as gathering and analyzing information to make a judgment about a party's compliance, or non-compliance, with an agreement.

Through verification, parties could satisfy themselves that other member states are not preparing for a new proliferation breakout, and that any such attempt would ideally be discovered before it is too late. Furthermore, the prospect of being discovered can deter states from considering a return to proliferation in the first place.

Of the possible arrangements that might shape a future Middle Eastern WMD Free Zone, a regional nuclear fuel cycle is particularly interesting, as it would entail the development of strong regional institutions carrying out several important tasks, including verification activities. Among these, the first would be setting up and maintaining a safeguards regime.

Safeguards are a strong verification measure, ensuring that current and future activities remain tied to peaceful purposes only. They are also inherently multilateral, involving personnel from many countries and from the IAEA; multilateral verification, as I will discuss below, presents several important advantages. In addition to safeguards, it is likely that a regional nuclear fuel cycle would include other measures that

increase transparency, such as exchanging information and jointly running facilities.

Such a regime could provide a good level of assurance that no illicit activities are taking place, and that nuclear materials in the Zone are not being diverted to military use.

However, safeguards and transparency measures are mostly focused on verifying the peaceful nature of present-day activities: there is a risk that a state might store away illicit materials and technologies before the zone is established, and use them at a later stage in the future.

Illicit proliferation activities relevant to the zone can be carried out at any point of a time continuum that goes from the present day and expands into the future. To counter this risk, verification activities must cover the entire continuum, as well, and thus should include verification of initial disarmament.

This process can be divided in several different stages: for every development of the WMD Free Zone, and of the related cooperation on a regional nuclear fuel cycle, there is a verification activity that can – and should - be implemented to provide assurance to all state parties:

- first of all, as the member states who are in possess of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and of materials that can be used to build such weapons, disarm and put such materials under control, they should submit a baseline declaration, and both the declaration and the disarmament process should be verified.
- secondly, as the WMDFZ is established, safeguards should be implemented in all state parties.
- finally, as cooperation over nuclear-related activities increases, so should activities that promote transparency.

It is very important, in such a context, that verification is carried out in a way that guarantees fairness, objectivity and respect of common rules, and that insures transparency in the process, as well as in the results.

The best way to achieve this is to make every step of the verification effort multilateral: any arrangement involving multinational personnel will contain inherent checks and balances, as all, or almost all states in the Zone are represented and directly involved in the operations through a trusted representative, and all can observe each other to insure that procedures are followed correctly. Multilateral approaches to verification can yield strong results, backed by high levels of confidence.

In the context of a multilateral verification regime, furthermore, there is a strong case in favor of a central involvement of the IAEA over the matter.

First of all, all the countries in the region are already members of the Agency, and in a disarmed Middle East all would be signatories to the NPT, as well.

Secondly, it can be easily argued that the Agency has the political mandate to ensure that nuclear activities remain peaceful. The IAEA is also central in the safeguards activities of EURATOM, which has often been proposed as a model for nuclear cooperation in the zone.

Most important, though, is the Agency's invaluable capital of technical expertise in conducting verification: not only does the IAEA handle its extensive and comprehensive safeguards regime, but it has also been involved in other crucial experiences of nuclear disarmament verification, for example in South Africa. Moreover, the Agency's long experience in dealing with commercially secret and even proliferation-sensitive information would be a great asset to help manage such information during the

disarmament phase.

In addition, multilateral verification efforts could work in close synergy with other areas of activity of the Zone. One example, at the technical level, is that equipment and procedures developed for use during the verification inspections could lay down the foundations of common standards for pan-regional technical and scientific cooperation.

Indeed, VERTIC is working to develop future approaches for multilateral nuclear disarmament verification involving the IAEA.

One of our current priorities is capacity-building in member states, ensuring that the capital of experience and technical know-how is not confined to the NWS and does not go slowly lost over time, but is preserved and developed in NWS and NNWS alike, so that, when there is finally a political movement towards disarmament, the Agency will have all the means to fulfill its mandate.

VERTIC is also engaging in outreach to promote the idea that the IAEA should take a leading role in verifying nuclear disarmament, and working on key technical issue such as the production and authentication of common equipment.

In conclusion, multilateral disarmament verification is necessary to build a WMD Free Zone, and to move beyond that and into region-wide nuclear cooperation: far from being two separate and distant issues, they are two part of the same continuum, and multilateral verification can provide all State Parties with the required trust, confidence and transparency from the very first step.