

EU Non-PROLIFERATION CONSORTIUM

The European network of independent non-proliferation think tanks

The Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group: still relevant to the Middle East?

PETER JONES

Background paper

EU Seminar to promote confidence building and in support of a process aimed at establishing a zone free of WMD and means of delivery in the Middle East

Brussels, 6–7 July 2011

The EU Non-Proliferation Consortium is a network of independent non-proliferation think tanks to encourage discussion of measures to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems within civil society, particularly among experts, researchers and academics. Any opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium or any of its individual institutes.



July 2011

Contents

I. Introduction	1
II. The ACRS experience: an assessment	1
II. Lessons from ACRS	4
III. Discussions of regional security since ACRS	7
IV. Conclusions	10

About the author

Peter Jones is an Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa. He was Desk Officer for Canada's involvement in ACRS in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and has been involved in numerous regional Track Two projects since then.

Abbreviations

ACRS	Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CBMs	Confidence-and security building measures
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangement
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
MEPP	Middle East Peace Process
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
UNSCOM	United National Special Commission on Iraq
WMD	Weapons of mass destruction

I. Introduction

Official negotiations over arms control and disarmament in the Middle East have lain dormant since the demise of the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group (ACRS) in the mid-90s. Indeed, ACRS remains the only attempt ever made in the region to stimulate and carry forward a multilateral official negotiation over these issues.

This does not mean, however, that there have been no other developments on the regional arms control and disarmament scene. The United National Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM), for example, proved that a weapons of mass destruction (WMD) inspections regime can be effective. This conclusion was not accepted at the time by the Bush Administration, and it was hardly done in a voluntary or cooperative manner so far as Iraq was concerned, but the UNSCOM experience does represent something of a marker for discussions of a future WMD-free zone, at least so far as verification may be concerned. In the early 90s desultory efforts were made by the P5 to develop a common approach to conventional arms supplies to the region, but little came of them. The UN Register of Conventional Arms has been in operation since 1991, but the Middle East is the region with the worst reporting record. Meanwhile, Iran has progressed in its nuclear programme to the point that few continue to believe that it is solely about the peaceful application of nuclear technology—though a debate rages over whether Iran has decided to cross the line and ‘go nuclear’ or whether it seeks to become a threshold state.

More recently, the 2010 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) adopted language calling for concrete actions to be taken within a specified time-frame to advance the long-standing idea of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. Meanwhile, fears are growing that non-state actors across the region and beyond may master crude but effective WMD technologies.

The Middle East is presently undergoing one of its most profound political upheavals in decades. Although it is too soon to say whether the ultimate impact of these events will be positive, the mere fact that despots have been overthrown by largely peaceful popular action has taken the region in a new and welcome direction. What we do know is that many of the regional governments, which will emerge from the upheavals, are likely to be more influenced by popular opinion than their predecessors.

This paper will review the ACRS experience and identify the key issues, which confronted the group. The paper will supplement this with consideration of ideas, which have emerged from ‘Track Two’ work on regional security that has gone forward since ACRS ended in 1995. The paper will conclude with some thoughts on what all of this experience means in light of the 2010 NPT Review Conference language on the creation of a regional WMD-free zone.

II. The ACRS experience: an assessment

The Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) featured an inter-locking framework of bilateral and multilateral talks. The bilaterals involved Israel and its neighbours (Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority and Syria) and were meant to find resolution to the specific bilateral disputes between them. These bilateral talks were complemented by a set of multilateral talks involving a broad membership from the Middle East and beyond. The objective of these multilateral talks was to tackle wider regional issues. There were five multilateral groups, of

which ACRS was one. Each had an extra-regional chair (or ‘Gavel’) and met in both plenary and various working groups.¹ The multilaterals went into limbo in 1995 as the bilateral process faltered. In many cases, informal activities continued, sometimes on a ‘Track Two’ basis. Many followers of Middle East affairs will be familiar with the term ‘Track Two’, particularly in dialogues between Israelis and Palestinians.² The term ‘Track Two Diplomacy’ was coined in 1981, but it had been around for many years before that.³

Between May 1992 and December 1994, six ACRS plenary sessions were held.⁴ Between these plenaries a number of inter-sessional activities took place, both in the region and outside it. ACRS inter-sessional activities were largely organized into two ‘baskets’: operational and conceptual. By and large, the operational basket concentrated on the negotiation of specific confidence-and security building measures (CBMs). These were often based on measures that had been adopted in other regional contexts, although considerable effort was expended on adapting them to the realities of the Middle East. The conceptual basket dealt with longer-term questions, including threat perceptions, visions of a future regional security order and how to deal with the region’s WMD problem.

There are many reasons, including logistical, why it was decided to create this structure. But it was also true that this structure separated the nuclear issue from specific CBMs being developed for implementation. Although ACRS never officially stated that the nuclear question was a long-term one, in effect this structure meant that the nuclear issue was seen as a question that would be addressed in the future when the regional security dynamic had considerably changed. This was the view held by Israel. Egypt took an opposite view, supported in varying degrees by the other Arab delegations. Cairo argued that the nuclear issue must be addressed early on in the process. It proposed that, at the least, Israel should accept a specific date or set of conditions at which time it would renounce its nuclear ambiguity and join the NPT.

This difference of view would become the key element in the demise of ACRS as some Arab states became increasingly convinced that ACRS was unfairly biased towards the Israeli view of how the nuclear question should be addressed. Accordingly, Arab delegations began to block action on other issues. In addition to this pressure, ACRS would eventually suffer from the general slow-down of the multilateral process: as the bilaterals ground to a halt all of the multilaterals suffered accordingly.

¹ For more on the multilaterals see Peters, J., *Pathways to Peace: The Arab-Israeli Multilateral Talks* (The Royal Institute of International Affairs: London, 1996).

² See, Agha, H., S. Feldman, A. Khalidi, and Z. Schiff, *Track II Diplomacy: Lessons from the Middle East* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004). See also Kelman, H.C., ‘Interactive Problem-solving: Informal Mediation by the Scholar Practitioner’, in Bercovitch, J. (ed.), *Studies in International Mediation: Essays in Honour of Jeffrey Z. Rubin* (Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2002).

³ For a history of Track Two see Fisher, R.J., ‘Historical Mapping of the Field of Inter-active Conflict Resolution’, in Davies, J., and E. Kaufman, (eds.), *Second Track/Citizen’s Diplomacy: Concepts and Techniques for Conflict Transformatio*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002). See also Jones, P., *Canada and Track Two Diplomacy*, (Toronto; Canadian International Council, 2008), section 1.

⁴ For more on ACRS see: ‘Middle East Peace Process Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group’, Fact Sheet, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Department of State, 1 July, 2001; Fahmy, N., ‘Special Comment’, *Disarmament Forum*, no. 2, 2001, pp. 3–5; Feldman, S., *Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East* (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1997) especially pp. 7–16; Griffiths, D., *Maritime Aspects of Arms Control and Security Improvement in the Middle East*, IGCC Policy Paper no. 56 (Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation: San Diego, 2000); Jentleson, B., *The Middle East Arms Control and Security Talks: Progress, Problems and Prospects*, IGCC Policy Paper no. 2 (University of California: Los Angeles, 1996); Jones, P., ‘Arms Control in the Middle East: is it time to renew ACRS?’ *Disarmament Forum*, no. 2, 2005, pp. 56-62; Jones, P., ‘Negotiating Regional Security in the Middle East: The ACRS Experience and Beyond’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2003; Jones, P., ‘Arms Control in the Middle East: Some Reflections on ACRS’, *Security Dialogue*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1997; and Landau, E., *Arms Control in the Middle East: Cooperative Security Dialogue and Regional Constraints* (Sussex Academic Press: Brighton, 1996).

ACRS was a considerable success in many ways. It accomplished a great deal, particularly in the elaboration of several far-reaching CBMs. However, none of the ACRS texts were ever formally adopted (although some have been informally implemented by some regional states), and the group stalled in 1995. Why?

The answer to this question lies, in part, in the political realities of the Middle East as the peace process was faltering. This was a dynamic beyond ACRS; if all of the multilaterals failed, it is difficult to see how ACRS could have kept going. But there are also lessons to be learned from the way ACRS was structured. Indeed, ACRS stalled before the other four multilateral groups, due to differences over the nuclear issue. In analysing where ACRS went wrong, the objective is not to point fingers or lay blame but rather to identify and learn lessons for the future.

The first key problem of ACRS lay in its membership. As ACRS was a part of the peace process, Iran, Iraq and Libya were not invited by the ACRS Gavels to participate. It may have been the case that the United States was not prepared to ask these countries because of its own differences with them, and it is unlikely that they would have agreed to participate had they been invited, as they did not support the peace process. Meanwhile, neither Syria nor Lebanon would agree to participate in the multilateral groups until their bilateral negotiations with Israel had been resolved. These ‘no shows’ had a critical impact on the ability of the process to seriously address regional security issues. It is very difficult to imagine how a discussion of a regional WMD-free zone could have succeeded in the absence of Iran, Iraq, Libya and Syria, all states suspected at the time of WMD activities.

The second problem was that ACRS made the discussion of regional security a subset of the Arab–Israeli peace process. Many Arab delegates (for example, from the Gulf) would privately note that they were not especially concerned over Israel and could have adopted CBMs with that country if the political situation had permitted. These countries would have liked to explore CBMs with their immediate regional neighbours, but there were no such discussions within ACRS.⁵ Moreover, with Iran and Iraq not participating it is difficult to see how there could have been serious discussions of Gulf issues. Thus, although there are arms control and security issues that span the entire Middle East, there are also subregional issues, and this needs to be recognized. In Track Two work subsequent to ACRS the possibilities of subregional arms control and disarmament have been explored, with mixed results.

Thirdly, ACRS suffered from a structural problem: the question of its internal trade-offs. There were at least two distinct, but inter-related, trade-offs that affected ACRS. The first was the MEPP-wide trade-off between the bilaterals and the multilaterals. A fear was expressed by many Arab delegations that going ‘too far’ in the multilaterals would ‘reward’ Israel with normalized relations before it had made the necessary concessions in its dealings with the Palestinians and, to a lesser extent, the Syrians. Thus the adoption of many ACRS texts was deferred for reasons that had little to do with ACRS itself. The second trade-off, and in many ways the most serious, was over the nuclear issue, as has been noted.

Finally, ACRS did not begin with serious discussions on the concept of an indigenous Middle East cooperation and security system. There was some discussion of this issue at the very beginning of ACRS, but it was largely a series of lectures on the experience of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), rather than an exploration of how a truly Middle Eastern system might be created. Indeed, the underlying assumption, at least on the part of many delegations, was that the success of the peace process would

⁵ There was informal discussion by some ACRS participants of the idea of creating a subregional process within ACRS, but it was never seriously acted upon before the group stalled. Personal recollection of the author.

provide a vision of the Middle East around which to frame a regional cooperation and security structure. The vision of regional security that this produced was one in which regional security was primarily a function of the resolution of the Arab–Israeli dispute. This is not a true picture of the state of the region; even if the Arab–Israeli dispute is resolved tomorrow, there will be many other serious security issues to be dealt with in the Middle East.

II. Lessons from ACRS

If some new form of regional arms control and security dialogue is to be created, the concerned states should reflect on this experience and learn some lessons. The following six points are not meant to be an exhaustive list of the possible changes that need to be considered, but they provide a starting point.

Don't make the discussion of regional security and arms control part of the peace process

The Middle East needs to have a dialogue on the subject of regional security for its own sake, not as an offshoot of the peace process. Obviously, there will be a relationship between the willingness of Middle Eastern states to consider new approaches to regional cooperation and the success of the peace process. But that relationship should not be institutionalized and should not form the foundation of any new arms control and regional security process. There are many security issues between, and within, states in the Middle East that involve the Arab–Israeli dispute peripherally, if at all. Certainly, more people have died in the region's other conflicts than have died in the Arab–Israeli wars, and the only instances of WMD use in the Middle East have had nothing to do with the issue of Palestine.

Also, by removing any new regional security and arms control talks from the peace process, countries like Iran may be able to reconsider their participation. This may require a creative approach at first. For example, contacts involving representatives of certain states acting in their official capacities may not be possible, but a 'Track 1.5' approach may allow at least preliminary discussions between responsible people to go forward.⁶ There may be some experiences developed in the Asian context that could be relevant here.

Process has a value in itself

ACRS became very results focused. This, in turn, created a built-in opportunity for those who wanted to exploit trade-offs to stall the process. In reality, the creation of a new regional security dynamic is a lengthy, and by no means linear, process. Indeed, in reflecting back on regional processes that have greatly changed the perceptions and dynamics of various regions of the world, long-term regular interaction and dialogue were at least as important as any of the specific agreements achieved.

Thus, any future effort should begin with a sustained dialogue over what regional countries want to get out of the process—in effect, an exploration of the 'first principles' of a future

⁶ For more see Mapendere, J., 'Track One and Half Diplomacy and the Complementarity of Tracks', *Culture of Peace Online Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 66-81. Susan Allen Nan has defined Track One and a Half as 'Diplomatic initiatives that are facilitated by unofficial bodies, but directly involve officials from the conflict in question.' Nan, S.A., 'Track one-and-a-Half Diplomacy: Contributions to Georgia-South Ossetian Peacemaking', in Fisher, R.J., *Paving the Way: Contributions of Interactive Conflict Resolution to Peacemaking* (New York: Lexington, 2005)

regional security system. This dialogue should feature discussions on threat perceptions, examinations of how other regions have approached regional security (not with the intent of copying their experiences, but as a stimulant to Middle Eastern thinking about how a unique and indigenous process may be created) and a discussion of the definition of ‘security’ in the Middle East.⁷

Explore new topics, structures and approaches

This point is particularly important as there are many issues that need to be discussed which are only peripherally related to ‘security’ as it is traditionally defined. Instead, it may be necessary for regional states to have a quiet dialogue over how they will manage change in their countries in such a way as to avoid confrontation. These discussions could include subjects such as the security consequences of environmental change, or even social issues which have a security bearing on the region. In the wake of the ‘Arab spring’ we are seeing how serious this can be.

Above all, the region itself must take the lead in developing a conception of its future and its needs—extra-regional players have an important facilitative role to play but cannot, ultimately, force this. This is easy to say but hard to do. Indeed, many regional countries have specifically avoided such discussions in the past, as they did not want to confront the difficult issues such a discussion would raise. That may eventually change as a consequence of the ‘Arab spring’, but this is not yet certain. The willingness of at least some regional countries to step forward and lead, perhaps not right away but at some point after a new process begins, will be a key indicator of how successful a new regional security process is likely to be.

It is only out of an in-depth discussion on the ‘first principles’ of a new regional cooperation and security dialogue that the structure of such a process will emerge. It is too soon to say what this might be, but it probably will not resemble ACRS as it was. One could imagine that instead of the conceptual and operational baskets, the new process may develop into an interlocking set of region-wide and subregional dialogues. The key is to avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Some of the issues in such a process must be dealt with at a pan-regional level, while others are best dealt with subregionally (or even bilaterally). In this context, the region should be defined inclusively, and there should be a seat at the table for all who wish to participate.

The goal is not a specific agreement, but a new approach to regional cooperation and security

In the detailed discussions of texts at ACRS meetings, it was forgotten that no particular agreement, no matter how ambitious, can serve as the foundation of a new approach to regional security in the Middle East. Any successor to ACRS may well be structured to recognize a very different relationship between arms control and security questions. Simply put, it is the creation of a new approach or system for regional dialogue and cooperation on security issues, broadly defined, that will set the stage for successful arms control. Research and writing on this idea have explored the concept of some sort of Middle East cooperation and security structure. Much of this research has drawn on the experiences of Asia, Europe

⁷ As previously mentioned, there were some discussions on these issues at the very beginning of the ACRS process. However, they tended to be more a set of lectures to the Middle Eastern participants about how the OSCE worked, than an attempt to engage them in the development of their own regional model. There was also some discussion of the regional future in the conceptual basket, but few regional countries participated seriously.

and elsewhere, although making clear that the Middle East is unique and will have to develop its own regional system.⁸

Be realistic as to expectations, especially at first, especially with respect to WMD

Whatever structure the dialogue eventually takes, this will be a long-term, ‘multi-generational’ process. Placing too great a set of expectations on a new process at its outset will only lead to frustration. Moreover, it is naïve to believe that all issues of Middle Eastern security can be addressed by any process, particularly at the beginning. As noted, some issues will continue to play out in other fora, or even bilaterally, and demands that one side or the other renounce long-standing policies as a *prelude* to beginning a process turn the issue on its head. Long-standing security policies are renounced as a *result* of a process of changing regional security realities.

This is particularly true of the WMD issue. It is tempting to believe that the complete renunciation of all WMD capabilities by some regional countries will take place near the beginning of a new regional arms control and security discussion. But it is highly unlikely. Indeed, the renunciation of such capabilities is itself more a process that unfolds over a period of time than something that happens at a specific moment.

Research into cases of nuclear renunciation or reversal suggests that this process is a complex one, with several factors in play.⁹ Thus, even if a state commits to rid itself of its WMD capability, it is likely that it will ‘hedge’ until such time as it is certain that the regional security situation has evolved to the point whereby a rapid worsening is no longer possible.¹⁰ A new regional security and arms control dialogue will have to consider how this dynamic might play out for several countries in the Middle East. Given the very difficult history of the Middle East and its many interlocking rivalries, it is likely that a Middle Eastern WMD-free zone will have to be able to deal with hedging by several potential members for a time. Thus, at least in its WMD dimension, the new regional security dialogue will, at least initially, seek to:

- place some rules on hedging behaviour;
- offer rewards for those who go beyond hedging and completely renounce the WMD option, including security guarantees; and
- promote the eventual renunciation of hedging itself—though that will take years and only be achieved in the context of fundamental changes in the regional security paradigm.¹¹

⁸ The principal texts are Jones, P., *Towards a Regional Security Regime for the Middle East: Issues and Options* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: Stockholm, 1998), available at: <http://books.sipri.org/files/misc/SIPRI98Jones.pdf>; S. Feldman and A. Toukan, *Bridging the Gap: A Future Security Architecture for the Middle East* (Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); and the collection of essays in the 2003 special issue on ‘Building Regional Security in the Middle East: International, Regional and Domestic Influences’, *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, Sep. 2003.

⁹ The key texts are T.V. Paul, *Power versus Prudence: Why Nations Forgo Nuclear Weapons* (McGill-Queens Press: Montreal, 2000); M. Reiss, *Bridled Ambitions: Why States Constrain Their Nuclear Capability*, (Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Washington DC, 1995); E. Solingen, ‘The Political Economy of Nuclear Restraint’, *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Fall), 1994; and W.C. Potter, *The Politics of Nuclear Renunciation: The Cases of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine*, Occasional Paper no. 22, (Henry L. Stimson Center: Washington DC, 1995).

¹⁰ The idea of hedging was advanced by A. Levite in his ‘Never Say Never Again: Nuclear Reversal Revisited’, *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 3 (Winter, 2002/03), pp. 59–88.

¹¹ Jones, P. ‘A WMD Free Zone within a Broader Gulf and Middle East Security Architecture’, *Gulf Research Center, Policy Analysis Papers* (Gulf Research Center: Dubai, Mar. 2005).

The role of external parties

ACRS was chaired by the United States and Russia, with the USA leading. Other extra-regional countries facilitated work on specific CBMs. Looking to the future, it is clear that involvement of key extra-regional countries is necessary in such areas as financial support and the security guarantees required for disarmament regimes. But consideration must be given to what role the extra-regional players should have in any successor to ACRS. Where extra-regional participants may play a useful role could be in facilitating the discussion, rather than leading and directing it, and the USA may not be best suited for this. This could be a useful role for the EU and its member states. Eventually, of course, if arms control agreements are struck, there will be a need for such things as guarantees, and the USA role will be critical.

As to the other extra-regional actors, care must be given to invite those who have a helpful role to play, without overwhelming the process. The extra-regional participants in ACRS outnumbered the regional participants three to one.¹² Beyond that, the countries of the region must begin to take a more active leadership role in determining how this new body should work. It was the constant hope of the active extra-regional participants in ACRS that this would be so. Many regional countries, however, preferred a more passive role, perhaps in keeping with their sense that serious discussion of regional security should await the resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict. If a new process is to be launched, perhaps the most critical indicator of whether it will succeed will be the attitude of the regional countries towards driving it themselves.

III. Discussions of regional security since ACRS

Since the demise of ACRS, an unofficial set of dialogues has arisen to explore these issues at the level of so-called ‘Track Two diplomacy’.¹³ The relationship between ACRS and Track Two has evolved. Some of the first Track Two activities were designed to support ACRS by helping to develop the ACRS agenda and the understanding of regional officials of the issues they would face.¹⁴ Track Two was also meant to stimulate the creation of a community of experts, at both the official and academic levels, across the Middle East who could support an intensive and ongoing regional arms control process.¹⁵ As ACRS went into abeyance, some saw Track Two as a way to keep a semi-official process going during what was supposed to be a temporary lull. When it became apparent that ACRS was not going to restart, some of the most successful of such activities took on a life of their own moving far beyond what ACRS was able to consider. Many have also sought to incorporate participants from countries unable or unwilling to participate in ACRS.

¹² A list of ACRS participants may be found at <www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/2001/4271.htm>.

¹³ For more on Track Two and regional security in the Middle East see, Jones, P., ‘Filling a critical gap or just wasting time? Track Two diplomacy and regional security in the Middle East’, *Disarmament Forum*, no. 2, 2008; Kaye, D.D., *Talking to the Enemy: Track Two Diplomacy in the Middle East and South Asia* (RAND Corp: Santa Monica, 2007); Landau, E., *Arms Control in the Middle East: Cooperative Security Dialogue and Regional Restraints*, (Sussex Academic Press: Eastbourne; 2006), chapter 2; Jones, P., ‘Track II Diplomacy and the Gulf Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone’, *Security and Terrorism Research Bulletin*, no. 1, Oct., 2005 (GRC: Dubai, Oct. 2005), at: http://www.grc.ae/bulletin_WMD_Free_Zone.pdf; and Kaye, D.D., ‘Track Two Diplomacy and Regional Security in the Middle East’, *International Negotiation: A Journal of Theory and Practice*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2001.

¹⁴ Personal discussions with organisers and participants in early ACRS-related Track Two projects.

¹⁵ Epistemic communities are networks of experts who have jointly developed a common set of understandings on an issue. See, Adler, E., ‘The Emergence of Co-operation: National Epistemic Communities and the International Evolution of the Idea of Nuclear Arms Control’, *International Organisation*, vol. 46, no. 1, Winter, 1992.

Track Two on regional security in the Middle East has thus now moved beyond the ACRS years and come into its own right. Over several years, a variety of groups have been active¹⁶ in analysing the differences between these various projects. They can be separated between:

- those which take a subregional focus concentrating on either the Gulf or the Mediterranean as specific areas in which a regional cooperation and security system should be developed first before a region-wide system;
- those which believe that a region-wide cooperation and security system should be explored, although this does not preclude the development of subregional approaches at the same time; and
- those which do not explore the question of regional or subregional approaches but are more interested in exploring aspects of arms control cooperation in the Middle East.

A second level which characterises the differences between many of the projects is over the question of what *kind* of security is sought and in what space.¹⁷ Most Middle East regional security projects have concentrated on ‘collective’ and ‘cooperative’ security, in their state-centric meanings. **Collective security**, or defence, describes a system whereby a group of states perceive a common threat or enemy and have banded together against it. An example is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). **Cooperative security**, in modern usage,¹⁸ posits that a group of states have identified a common set of issues or concerns and are establishing a set of rules of conduct and a mechanism to discuss their concerns in order to develop more predictable relations. Two examples are the OSCE and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).¹⁹

Interestingly, the two are not mutually exclusive. In Europe, the OSCE and NATO co-exist, as did the OSCE’s predecessor (the CSCE) with both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. In Asia, ASEAN co-exists with collective defence arrangements, such as the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA), which involves certain ASEAN countries—Malaysia and Singapore—and Australia, New Zealand and the UK. One does not thus have to choose; each arrangement can exist within a given space, provided their objectives are not mutually contradictory.

Some regional security Track Two projects have been primarily focused on collective security, while others have been examining cooperative security concepts. Some of those who were most keen on a Gulf system in the wake of the US invasion of Iraq were largely advancing the idea of a collective security arrangement between the US and certain Gulf

¹⁶ See Kaye, ‘Talking to the Enemy’ (note 12) chapter 2 (pp. 31-73) and Jones, ‘Filling a Critical Gap’ (note 12), pp. 5-6 for a summary and analysis of the various regional security Track Two projects as of the date of publication of those articles. In the interests of full disclosure, the present author has led or been involved in several of these.

¹⁷ These ideas are further developed in Jones, P., ‘Is a Common Threat Perception a Necessary Precondition for the Creation of a Regional Security and Co-operation System?’, Conflict INFOCUS, no. 21, 2008, (Regional Centre on Conflict Prevention: Amman, Dec. 2007), available at; http://www.rcpp-jid.org/infocus/infocus_21.pdf For a discussion of the different kinds of security see Dewitt, D., ‘Common, Comprehensive and Co-operative Security’, The Pacific Review, vol. 7, no. 1, 1994.

¹⁸ For more on cooperative security see Nolan, J., Global Engagement; Co-operation and Security in the 21st Century (The Brookings Institution: Washington DC, 1994). Confusion exists because the term ‘Co-operative security’ was employed after World War I by President Wilson and the League of Nations in a way more akin to what we now call collective security; a group of states banding together to collectively deter and resist aggression. In this paper, the term is not used in that sense.

¹⁹ The OSCE and ASEAN have social and economic functions which go beyond narrowly defined security.

countries, possibly to form the backbone of an eventual broader system.²⁰ Others, whether talking about the idea of a Gulf-first approach, or a wider pan-regional structure, have been advancing the idea of a primarily cooperative regional security system.²¹

In the case of those projects examining a regional, or subregional collective security system, the participating states would be only a certain number of regional countries and they would be banding together with the US to resist a perceived aggressor. In the case of those Middle East Track Two projects examining a cooperative system, it was expected that a much greater number of regional countries would participate (and that the system would be open to all) and that it would not be aimed at countering a specific country, so much as developing a Code of Conduct and associated dialogue mechanisms to give that Code effect. In other words, there would be no common ‘threat’, in the form of a specific other country, but rather a general agreement that uncertainty and lack of common standards of behaviour were the danger.

The matter is further confused by the fact that various Track Two projects have sought to tackle various geographical dimensions of the issue, and some of them have taken an ‘all-or-nothing’ approach. In the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, some authors began to argue for a subregional approach focused on the Gulf.²² Most took the view that this would work because it would exclude the Arab–Israeli dispute from discussion by cutting out the countries directly involved in that confrontation from the subregional security discussions. There is an appreciation today that such a simple course will not necessarily yield early or dramatic results.

The supposed ease with which a purely Gulf approach could be initiated proved illusory. It turned out that the Arab–Israeli issue could not simply be taken off the table. Moreover, Arab analysts outside of the Gulf argued that their countries should also be included in subregional deliberations as they make contributions to that area and their interests are bound up in it.²³ More recently, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) itself has suggested that Jordan and Morocco might join. The pristine separation of one subregion from the wider Middle East is not so easy as it seems.

Interestingly, there were considerable differences of view amongst those who were writing on the idea of a Gulf subregional approach as to what *kind* of security should be striven for. Some of those who were most keen on a Gulf system in the wake of the US invasion of Iraq were largely advancing the idea of a collective security arrangement between the US and certain Gulf countries which would exclude Iran.²⁴ Others were advancing the idea of a primarily inclusive, cooperative subregional security system.²⁵ This difference is important in that it demonstrates that, even within the more supposedly ‘simple’ subregional approach, there are still considerable differences of view as to what is being sought. It is hardly

²⁰ See, for example, the different ideas proposed in Yaffe, M., ‘The Gulf and a New Middle East Security System’, *Middle East Policy Journal*, vol. XI, no. 3, Fall 2004, and Russell, J.A., ‘Searching for a Post-Saddam Regional Security Architecture’, *MERIA Journal*, Mar. 2003.

²¹ See Jones (note 8); Jones (note 11); The Stanley Foundation, ‘The Future of Gulf Security’, Project Report, Nov. 2007; and Leverett, F., ‘The Middle East: Thinking Big’, *The American Prospect Online*, Feb. 21, 2005.

²² For examples see, Leverett, (note 23); Jones (note 11); Yaffe (note 22); Mokhtari, F., ‘Security in the Persian Gulf; Is a Security Framework Possible?’ *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Feb. 2004; Russell (note 22); Pollack, K.M., ‘Securing the Gulf’, *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug., 2003; McMillan, J., Sokolsky, R., and Winner, A., ‘Toward a New Regional Security Architecture’, *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer, 2003; Rathmell, A., Karasik, T., and Gompert, D., ‘A New Persian Gulf Security System’, *RAND Issue Paper*, 2003.

²³ See, for example, Kadry Said, M., ‘Potential Egyptian Contribution to a Security Framework in the Gulf’, *Middle East Policy Journal*, vol. XI, no. 3, Fall, 2003.

²⁴ See, for example, Yaffe (note 22), and Russell (note 22)

²⁵ See, for example, The Stanley Foundation (note 23) and Leverett (note 23).

surprising that progress has been far slower than anticipated by those who were early proponents of this scheme.

One interesting question which has largely been lost in this debate between a pan-regional or a subregional approach is the question of whether it has to be approached as an ‘either/or’ issue. One author, writing in the immediate aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq, and perhaps trying to generate policy impetus in Washington, went so far as to categorically express the view that ‘pan-Middle East strategies have a single major problem: they don’t work’. Therefore, such ‘pan-regional security approaches should be abandoned’. Instead it was proposed that all effort be concentrated on a Gulf based collective security system involving the US and select regional countries, one which might, in time, be replicated in the other subregions of the Middle East and possibly tied together into a pan-regional network of collective security arrangements between the US and key states in the subregions across the Middle East.²⁶

This does not mean that the idea of subregional approaches is itself invalidated. It is obvious that there are some issues best dealt with on a subregional basis, just as there are those which seem to require a more pan-regional approach. Moreover, this is not new. A group of regional experts who met several times in the late-90s to consider how a regional security system might be achieved went over this ground in considerable detail. In a section entitled ‘The role of subregions and the relationships between bilateral, subregional and global security arrangements’, the so-called *SIPRI Report*²⁷ examined these questions and came to many of the same observations, although they drew different conclusions from them. In particular, they found that:

...the creation of a region-wide security regime should be undertaken in a manner which is synergistic with bilateral, multilateral or subregional approaches to security issues. This could best be accomplished by establishing a broad set of principles (for regional conduct) which would be relevant to all levels of discourse in the region and then taking a functional approach as to which issues should be dealt with at which levels and in what manner. Some issues, such as those related to weapons of mass destruction will require a regional approach. Others may best be dealt with subregionally.²⁸

The fundamental mechanism by which a sufficiently flexible concept could be achieved was identified by the SIPRI process as being that of *Geometry Variable*. This is a notion that, within the framework of an overall set of regional principles, progress on different issues will be made at different rates of speed and in different forums, and even by different constellations of actors, as appropriate to the issue at hand—some approaches will be primarily collective; some will be primarily cooperative; some will be subregional; some will be pan-regional. What is required, however, is an overarching set of norms of conduct to bind the whole together.

IV. Conclusions

If another attempt is made to create a regional security and arms control dialogue, it should be very different to ACRS. Most importantly, a new regional security dialogue should not be linked to the peace process, even if there will be an informal linkage in practice. Beyond that point, and in reviewing the path that other regions have taken, a few key points emerge.

²⁶ Yaffe (note 22).

²⁷ SIPRI (note 8), pp. 21-23. A list of participants in the SIPRI process may be found at pp. 51-53.

²⁸ SIPRI (note 8), p. 22.

First, this is a long and winding road. Those who believe that arms control agreements, and an underlying security system, can be created with a few declarations are wrong. A lengthy and difficult process of dialogue and small steps towards big goals lies in store. Expectations must be kept realistic, even as a vision that some might consider idealistic is pursued. Above all, the creation of such a system ultimately involves the states of the region accepting significant changes to their most fundamental policies, and this does not usually happen quickly.

Second, process really does matter. The temptation to seek agreements too quickly should be avoided. In every other case where a region has successfully established a regional security and arms control order, the agreements came out of a process of discussion. During this period the regional players educated each other as to their needs and perceptions and built confidence. It was from this investment in time that the outlines of subsequent arms control treaties emerged. There is no reason to expect that the Middle East will be any different.

Third, arms control is not achieved in a vacuum. Without an effort to establish a regional political and security order it is highly unlikely that arms control can be addressed. Emphasis should thus be placed on creating a regional cooperation and security system first, and on arms control second. Of course, this is not to say that discussions over arms control issues should wait for the day when a regional system is established; the two sets of discussions go hand-in-hand.

Fourth, the new process must be more inclusive than ACRS was. Key states (such as Iran and Iraq) must be offered a seat at the table. Separating the new process from ACRS would be an important step?? to achieving this goal. But it will also be necessary to find creative ways to facilitate dialogue between states that do not yet recognize each other. These could well include greater use of various forms of structured ‘Track Two’ and ‘Track 1.5’ diplomacy to permit such discussions. The issue of who might chair such a dialogue may also play a role here. If US policies make it difficult to open the door to Iran, perhaps there is a role for the EU or some of its member states to take the lead in facilitating these discussions.

Fifth, it is important to avoid ‘either/or’ formulations as to objectives, definitions of the region or other key issues. We do not yet know what format will work best. Where appropriate, some countries of the region, and some outside powers, will create their own collective security arrangements. But this does not mean that an inclusive cooperative security system cannot also be explored. The two have co-existed in other regions and enhanced each other. Similarly, at the same time, both pan-regional and subregional dialogues could be developed—each stressing issues that are appropriate and necessary. Above all, it will be important to avoid ‘either/or’ approaches to such issues in considering the region’s future.

Finally, it is important to be realistic. Real change in the region’s security dynamic will require reforms and changes in some states, or between them as a result of bilateral processes. But the experience of other regions is that the establishment of a regional system provided a framework within which such changes could be managed peacefully, and this framework was crucially important. There is no reason to believe that things will be different in the Middle East.

The creation of a regional security system in the Middle East will be complex. Different conceptions of the basic notions of security are in play; the issue of the region and the subregions requires thought; the role of the outside powers remains vexing, and more. One way forward may be to accept that no single approach or regional security system can

possibly address the many questions in play. Rather, it might be best to conceive of the road ahead as being one of trying to explore the idea of a ‘system of systems’.

The development of such systems in other regions of the world has been a long-term process. A patient, long-term view is required, as well as a degree of flexibility. It may well be, at first, that not all countries will be prepared to participate in official discussions until the Middle East peace process is completed. Perhaps only a few regional countries will take part in any official track at the beginning of the process, and the issues it might discuss could be relatively uncontroversial.

However, a broader cross-section of regional states may be willing to participate in a structured, semi-official process that would discuss many issues. This will require the creation of an ongoing ‘Track Two’ process dedicated to the discussion of regional cooperation and security issues, but a Track Two which enjoys close links to official diplomacy.²⁹ Such a system might draw some lessons from Track Two as it has been practised in the Asia-Pacific region, where a standing unofficial process exists to complement and support the official process. Though not without its difficulties,³⁰ this process permits regional countries to explore ideas that are too sensitive for the official process, in a low-key, relatively low-risk environment.

The advantage of such a system for the Middle East would lie in its ability to assist the regional states in transcending the ‘recognition barrier’, which is so tied up in the Arab–Israeli process. The trick is to imbue such an unofficial setting with sufficient structure and ‘connectivity’ to the official track that it is capable of fostering useful, policy-relevant discussions. Of course, such a track could not make or adopt decisions. Only official meetings can do that. But it would serve at least as a forum where discussions on matters of mutual interest could take place until political developments in the region progress to the point that an official process could be developed.

What we are likely to see in the Middle East is some very messy combination of all the trends discussed in this paper. There will continue to be bilateral security arrangements between the USA and certain states. There will continue to be a debate over whether a subregional or region-wide approach is best—and probably both will go forward together in some way.

Hopefully, however, there will also be room for the development of a more cooperative type of arrangement—one which seeks to develop rules of the road for regional conduct and which creates a truly region-wide mechanism for dialogue over pressing concerns. That would be the major departure over the present regional architecture. As we are beginning to see, there are broader dialogues going on over regional concerns—the process whereby Iraq’s neighbours meet with Iraq is an example. But this needs to be institutionalised in some way and given a set of concrete rules of conduct as its basis, if it is to be anything other than reactive.

Above all, a longer term vision is required. Policy-makers need a broad sense of where the region needs to go, even if the map to get there is not yet fully fleshed out. Policy-makers need to bear in mind that a regional security ‘system of systems’ is not going to spring up overnight. It may, in the first instance, feature small steps over small issues. It may begin on

²⁹ A phenomenon sometimes known as ‘Track 1.5’ diplomacy (note 6).

³⁰ For an analysis of Track Two diplomacy on regional security in the Asia-Pacific region see Ball, D., Milner, A., and Taylor, B., ‘Track Two Security Dialogue in the Asia-Pacific: Reflections and Future Directions’, *Asian Security*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2006, p. 182. See also Job, B., ‘Track 2 Diplomacy: Ideational Contribution to the Evolving Asia Security Order’, in Alagappa, M., (ed.) *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Stanford University press: Stanford, 2002).

both Track 1 and Track 2 levels simultaneously. This type of regional arrangement is a necessary component of the Middle East's response to what has happened in Iraq and its response to wider trends, which are playing themselves out in the 'Arab spring'. The Middle East desperately requires some rules of behaviour for its states and a mechanism to allow for ongoing dialogue over security issues. One may argue that such a system must await the resolution of the Arab–Israeli dispute. However, in no other region of the world was it necessary for the central dispute of that region to be resolved before a regional system could be created. Indeed, the creation of such a system was seen as critical in managing and ultimately helping to resolve the central dispute.