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Panel topic:

"Steps Toward Implementation of the 1995 Middle East

Resolution"

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What I propose to do is to focus on the idea of creating a WMDFZ in the ME – which is at the heart of the 1995 Resolution. It is an idea that encourages us to think about the value of considering weapons in their relevant regional context: focusing on the full spectrum of relations, interactions, and other modes of state behavior that together make up the regional inter-state framework.

Disarmament goals cannot be effectively approached or sometimes even understood outside the context of state concerns, interests, behavior, and different manifestations of inter-state interactions and relations. And the dilemma is certainly not merely a question of the narrow self-interest of states to be nuclear vs. a collective interest in disarmament – this would be a somewhat superficial and even potentially misleading characterization of the situation, and of the dilemmas that arise in the sphere of international relations.

What I would like to do, therefore, is to move away from political positioning regarding the 1995 Resolution, and to instead focus on the conceptual issues that lie at the heart of our efforts to control the dangerous implications of WMD in our region -- which must be our goal.

I propose that when we think about the control of WMD in the Middle East today, we should be thinking about a *process* -→ a process in which both arms and behavior – especially inter-state relations – are discussed and assessed.

This process should allow us to tackle the context of *interests*, *concerns* and *regional relations* within which WMD are developed and exist, and to focus on the possible creation of *rules of the game* for engagement and peaceful coexistence among states. ---
→ the idea of a WMDFZ encourages this type of dialogue and discussion, whereas the NPT does not. Within the framework of the NPT an important norm against nuclear weapons was no doubt created; the problem is that in those cases where real problems

and security concerns were starkly apparent, these were *not addressed* by the treaty. Focus was only on the elimination of weapons as such, under *the assumption* that this was in fact the overriding interest of states in all cases, across the board. But not surprisingly, this assumption wasn't always warranted.

In fact, the relationship between *weapons* and *security* is much more complex than can be captured by any attempt to say that if all such weapons were simply eliminated, this would bring security and peace to different regions, and perhaps to the world. Because obviously, weapons are usually developed as a response to feelings of *in*security, which are due to poor inter-state relations; therefore, unless the sources of insecurity are confronted and addressed, different types of weapons will remain and very often be increased.

When we talk about WMD – esp. nuclear weapons – there is an added layer of technological and even *superpower status* that is very often associated with the achievement of indigenous nuclear

power, and this can also serve as a central motivation for some

states to attempt to develop these weapons, and needs to be

factored into the equation as well. (In fact, just last month, the

chairman of the Egyptian Foreign Affairs parliamentary committee

– Mustafa Fiqi – noted in an interview that a nuclear program is

one of the things that makes a country strong…)

In any case, it is quite clear, for example, that the 5 nuclear states

that are parties to the NPT in this status, even though they are

obliged to do so, have really *no intention* as of yet to completely

give up their nuclear arsenals. Some have agreed to reduce the

size of their arsenals, but they are not ready to give up the

minimum that they believe is necessary for deterrence purposes.

The same goes for India and Pakistan – both more recently

declared nuclear powers, outside the NPT frame; Israel also relies

on the deterrence that comes with its policy of ambiguity in the

nuclear realm.

So when we consider the situation in the Middle East, we cannot ignore the reality of threats to security that underlie current arsenals, and the major emphasis and focus of discussion of WMD must be directed to lowering the intensity of perceived threats and hopefully improving inter-state relations. *There's simply no way around this*, and any initiative that ignores this is bound to come up short.

In order to highlight the importance of *context*, I want to say a few words on Israel and the nuclear issue.

If you consider writings in Israel about the nuclear issue, you find that the nuclear option is referred to most often as an *insurance policy* against threats to Israel's very existence. This was the reasoning behind its development, and it remains the sole justification for its continued maintenance over the years. As such, Israel's frame is one of addressing a possible vulnerability that could spell the end of the state. With a nuclear capability, the reasoning is that survival would always be ensured.

Israel's unique policy of ambiguity and low nuclear profile seem to serve this rationale very well (even though ambiguity was not specifically planned in this way ahead of time).

But how is ambiguity interpreted by others?

When we check the dominant perceptions on both sides, we find that there are significant differences: Whereas *Israel* tends to regard this policy as an important manifestation of its message of *restraint* in the nuclear realm, *Arab states* have long maintained that the lack of transparency that comes with ambiguity is a *major problem*, and that it detracts from any prospect of building mutual confidence among Arab states and Israel in the nuclear area. These rather *polar assessments* of the situation are just one example of the kind of issues that absolutely must be placed on the table and discussed among the different parties.

I would add to this that when we consider the historical record going all the way back to the early 1970s, we find that even with an ambiguous policy, over the years Arab states have tended to

indeed regard Israel's nuclear potential as a weapon of last resort.

On the basis of research that I conducted into this question up until

the early 1990s, *implicit red lines* in the nuclear realm were

somehow conveyed and understood by all relevant parties. And

while Arab states were not always deterred from attacking Israel

(in 1973 and in 1991), there is evidence of a sensitivity to these

red lines as far as actual war plans, and not posing an existential

threat to Israel. So *implicit rules of the game* were created, which

is another important illustration of the role of *context* – of inter-state

relations – in all of this.

Now when proposing that issues and concerns need to be raised

in a regional framework – as part of the WMD-free zone discussion

– there are those that today claim they are *tired* of discussing.

Their argument is that we have already discussed these issues in

the context of the Arms Control and Regional Security working

group (ACRS); we have discussed them in the context of Track II

meetings, Track I and a half, etc.

To these people I want to say the following:

1) First, we need to spend more time learning the ACRS

   experience of the early 1990s --→ both appreciating its

   substantial successes, and understanding the reasons for its

   breakdown after 4 years, because there are different

   explanations, and the lessons are important;

2) Second, while it's true that Track II's were active during the

   ACRS years, and continued to deal with these issues up until

   around 2001, they were gradually losing steam because

   there was nothing going on at the official level; and in the

   years of the *Intifada* they basically ground to a halt, and there

   were no meetings of this type held in our region for at least 3

   years;

3) Third, when things began to pick up again a bit, about 2

   years ago, we found ourselves in a *much changed regional

   situation*, with the much more apparent need, for example, to

   take *Iran's nuclear ambitions* into account;

4) In short, you *cannot be impatient* with this kind of dialogue

   because it is dealing with a vastly complex array of regional

   relations and realities, and *it will take time*, esp. because our

starting point is a region where some of the states don't even

recognize others, or have diplomatic relations with them, and

this adds to the threat. We also have problems of

normalization of relations between states that have achieved

peace agreements.

Because weapons are an overt manifestation of problematic inter-

state relations, it is easier for us to focus on them, and to make

them the target of our arms control efforts. But it cannot be

emphasized enough that confronting the complex underlying web

of relationships is the real key to ultimate stability in the Middle

East. And it is in this regard that initial important strides were made

in ACRS.

Finally, I would add that when we look at current regional realities

– with reports of six states in the Middle East having expressed to

the IAEA their desire to develop nuclear programs, the Gulf

Cooperation Council states talking about a joint nuclear program,

and even Jordan's King Abdullah recently claiming that Jordan is

also interested – the importance of beginning official regional security discussions is all the more apparent. With these states still at the stage of intentions (and maybe even one step before that), the need to address what is *motivating them in this direction* in a dialogue framework is paramount.

And here we come to the difficult question of *Iran* –→ Iran is no doubt the primary motivating factor for these states to begin contemplating civilian nuclear programs at this time, which many fear could provide the basis for a military capability (as happened in the case of Iran itself).

So how does Iran factor into all of this? I think that at this point there are still more questions than answers, but I think it's clear that Iran's activities in the nuclear realm, together with indications of its ambitions to become a regional hegemon, have introduced a very strong element of instability in the region as a whole, and today many states *are extremely nervous* in the face of Iran's growing ability to stir up trouble.

For now, Iran's behavior and ambitions are what the international

community is focused on, and therefore explicit calls for a WMDFZ

in the direct context of UN Security Council resolutions on Iran are

surely not warranted. However, bringing Iran into line may be a

step forward for initiating such dialogue down the line.