

**ISRAELI PERSPECTIVES ON REGIONAL SECURITY**  
**AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING**

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## **ISRAELI PERSPECTIVES ON REGIONAL SECURITY AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING**

GERALD M. STEINBERG

“Israel will strive, as first steps, to conduct a regional security dialogue and to implement confidence-building measures that will increase openness and build trust and cooperation thereby making a significant contribution to ease tensions, reduce the prospects of surprise attacks, diminish the levels of suspicion and prevent armed conflict. The trust that will be built, and the parallel progress in the bilateral peace process between Israel and its neighbours, will enable the beginning of negotiations on more ambitious arms control measures.”

*Israel's Approach to Regional Security, Arms Control, and Disarmament*, Statement by H.E. Mr. Eytan Bentsur, Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel Before the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, September 4 1997

For almost half a century, the foundations of military strategy and national security remained relatively constant in both global and regional terms. The Cold War divided the world in half, between the West and East, with smaller states receiving weapons, training, economic assistance, and other forms of backing from their respective superpower patron. The nuclear stalemate deterred global conflict, but conventional warfare at a regional level was quite frequent.

In the 1990s, the combination of a number of factors led to fundamental changes in regional stability and threat perceptions, particularly in the Middle East and for Israel. The Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Middle East peace process, and the proliferation of non-conventional weapons all led to basic shifts in the nature of security and stability.

As a result of these changes, in most cases, the ability of individual states to maintain their security by acting unilaterally has decreased, while the role of regional security structures is increasing. In Europe, a number of regional security frameworks have been created, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Western European Union, which has established its own multilateral military capabilities (EUROFOR and EUROMARFOR). NATO has added regional peace keeping and peace making to its traditional mutual defense objectives. Regional security structures are also being discussed for Asia (in the context of the ASEAN Regional Forum), South Asia (India and Pakistan), and Africa.

The central elements of regional security are based on shared interests in regional stability and cooperation, as well as an agreed framework and “rules of the game” for dealing with differences and conflicts without the threat of violence.<sup>1</sup> Specific instruments include confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) designed to reduce tensions and prevent conflict among the states in the region, cooperative monitoring, crisis management

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<sup>1</sup> Michael N. Barnett, “Regional Security after the Gulf War”, *Political Science Quarterly*, 111:4, (1996/7)

and de-escalation, cooperation against sources of instability (such as terrorism and rogue states), regional peace-keeping forces, and arms control agreements. Arms control treaties and suppliers regimes (agreements on export limitation among the major suppliers of weapons and technologies) have become central elements of international relations, covering nuclear weapons and tests, chemical and biological agents, the transfer of ballistic missiles and related technology, land mines, and, in some areas, conventional weapons.

In Europe, many of these elements have been implemented, while in other regions, the process is only beginning. In the Middle East, consideration of regional security structures coincided with the 1991 Gulf War and with the Arab-Israeli peace process that began following the 1991 Madrid Conference.<sup>2</sup> The Madrid meeting also created the multilateral working group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS), which is one of five such multilateral working groups involving the participants in the Madrid process (the other groups dealt with economic cooperation, the environment, water, and refugees). The United States played a central role in the establishment and early meetings of the ACRS, and American representatives sought to emphasize the goal of replacing unilateral security structures with regional security in the Middle East.

In addition, the European multilateral organizations have initiated “Mediterranean security dialogues” with the objective of extending the concepts of regional security to this region. NATO, the OSCE, the WEU, and the European Union (“the Barcelona process”) all have such programs with somewhat different emphases and participants.

As a result, the major states in the region, including Israel, recognize that these initiatives will have important implications for their national security and for regional stability. In response, they have developed policies with respect to regional security, confidence and security-building measures, and arms control. As will be discussed in this paper, the Israel perspective and policy are based on the consideration of the potential benefits of such measures, as well as the realistic limitations resulting from the political and military environment.

### **The Framework for Regional Security**

The first phase in the development of a regional security system, whether in Europe or the Middle East, is agreement on a series of confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) and the implementation of these measures. CSBMs are defined as measures that allow for reduced tensions, greater cooperation, and increased stability, without creating substantial security risks for the countries involved.

In general, CSBMs include measures to prevent surprise attack, crisis communication and de-escalation, and general cooperation and exchange of information. The 1990 Vienna Agreement commits the members of the OSCE to the exchange of various forms of “military information” including the numbers of major weapons platforms (tanks, artillery, combat aircraft, etc.),

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<sup>2</sup> During the 1950s, the United States and Britain sought to develop the Baghdad Pact, modeled on NATO, as a regional military framework directed against the Soviet Union and local Communist and allied movements. This framework was short-lived and largely unsuccessful.

and annual calendars of “notifiable military activity”, including information on planned exercises. The regulations governing on-site inspections and the assistance provided to, and activity of the observers, are delineated in detail. The OSCE also operates a conflict prevention center in Vienna, which is responsible for “early warning, conflict prevention and crisis management”, and a database and communications network.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to CSBMs and CBMs, arms limitations and control agreements can play a central role in regional security systems, particularly in areas that are characterized by a long history of intense conflict. The concept of arms control is based on the search for common interests and mutual benefits that can be achieved, despite continued disagreement in some areas. The basic assumption behind arms control is that within the context of a conflict, such common interests exist, and that they can be codified in the form of agreements and treaties, or, in some cases, mutual tacit restraints. Arms control was central to the development of the post-Cold War European security system, beginning with the 1987 agreement on the Intermediate Nuclear Forces. In 1990, the Conventional Forces - Europe (CFE) Treaty placed specific limits on the conventional capabilities of the states in this region, and also established limits for deployments in specific areas and theaters. In both agreements, the verification mechanisms, including on-site inspections, the exchange of observers, and the possibility of overflights under the 1992 Open Skies Treaty are based on cooperation among the parties, are highly intrusive, and provide a high degree of assurance that the provisions are being honored on all sides.

### **Regional Security Efforts in the Middle East**

While it is often tempting to attempt to transfer the lessons of the CSCE to the Mediterranean, the structural differences are far greater than any similarities. In contrast to the dual or bipolar structure of the CSCE, based on the East-West divisions of the Cold War, the structure of the Mediterranean and Middle East is far more complex, in which different conflict zones are in linked interdependently. While North Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and Syria), the and the more northern region (Turkey and Syria), as well as the Gulf States (Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, etc.) are geographically distinct, the conflict zones overlap. Each zone has its own dynamics, and each is influenced by and influences the other zones. This creates a highly complex environment for efforts to develop confidence building and regional security in this region or regions.

The multiple asymmetries exacerbate the multipolarity and overlapping conflict zones. From Algeria to Iran, the states range from those with large territorial expanses to very small mini-states such as Israel and Kuwait, with no strategic depth. Other large asymmetries exist with respect to population size, economic capabilities, and political structures. These factors increase the complexity and obstacles to confidence building measures.

In addition, while post-Cold War Europe agreed on fundamental political principles, and all members of the CSCE accepted the centrality of the transition to democracy and the importance of human rights. No such

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<sup>3</sup> OSCE Handbook, p. 12, *Annual Report 1996 On OSCE Activities*, Organization for Security and Co-Operation In Europe, The Secretary General, Vienna, 15 January 1997

consensus exists in the Mediterranean and Middle East. The fundamental changes that began under Gorbachev in the mid-1980s, with the development of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, and the opening to the West, have no parallel in this region.

In this Middle East, over fifty years of intense ethno-national conflict, terrorism, and war have left a very high level of distrust. In contrast, while the Cold War was characterized by tensions and war threats between the major powers and two military alliances (NATO and the Warsaw Pact), direct combat was avoided. In this environment, the transition that began with the Helsinki process and the creation of the CSCE was relatively smooth.

There is also a very large gap in the perceptions that are characteristic of the states in the region. There is little communication or mutual understanding between the leaders and populations of opposing states. Central events such as the 1967 Arab-Israeli war are viewed from entirely different perspectives from Israel and from the Arab states, and the extent of this gap is not even understood.

In the Middle East, the existing threat level is high and increasing. From the violence that characterizes the conflict in Algeria, to the threats of weapons of mass destruction under development or in the stockpiles of many other states, including Saddam Hussein's Iraq, present a constant threat of conflict. Terrorism is still endemic in the region, in many cases supported by state sponsors.

In this environment, the role of deterrence increases, and this provides the background for the Israeli emphasis on the combination of conventional deterrence and the ambiguous nuclear option. The security dilemma, in which the deterrence capabilities that are developed by states such as Israel, are perceived as the source of threats to other states in the region, created a complex challenge for the development of any regional security system, and illustrates the need for confidence building measures.

### **The Foundations of CBMs and regional security**

The basis for a system of CBMs and CSBMs in Middle East can be traced to the limited deployment zones and verification measures that were created in the Sinai and in the Golan Heights following the 1973 war. In the Golan, the terms of the 1974 disengagement agreement and limited deployment zones are monitored by the UN forces (UNTSO and UNDOF), which inspect the military forces in both the Israeli and Syrian limited force zones every 14 days, and reports on any violations of the agreements. In addition, under the terms of the agreement, the UN has undertaken special inspections on short notice, during periods of tension, to insure that the terms are being honored and that additional forces beyond the agreed limits have not been introduced into these zones. In the Sinai, following the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, a special Multilateral Force (MFO) was created and is staffed by personnel from many countries in order to monitor and verify the terms of the agreement regarding limited force deployments.

Although these agreements and the associated verification mechanisms constitute CSBMs, they did not lead to further development of regional security or additional CSBMs. The next step in this process took place after the 1991 Gulf War, when the Bush Administration prepared a

Middle East Arms Control Initiative. This initiative included proposed regional limitations and mutual verification in the areas of nuclear, chemical, biological weapons, missiles, and also for conventional arms stockpiles.<sup>4</sup> This proposal did not advance very far, and was incorporated in the multilateral working groups on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) that met following the Madrid Conference.

The participants in the ACRS meetings included the North African countries, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE, and Bahrain, but, notably, not Syria, which refused to join the multilateral talks, nor the regional rogue states -- Iran, Iraq and Libya. (In addition, a number of extra-regional states participated, including the US and Russia, as co-sponsors, Japan, Canada, Australia, India, China, and a representative of the European Union.) Without the participation of Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Libya, the ability of ACRS to develop a regional security framework was limited from the beginning.

Substantively, the ACRS concept was based on the European experience, including the OSCE and the CSBMs that were developed in this context. Thus, the first item on the agenda for ACRS was the negotiation and implementation of CSBMs. In May 1993, the ACRS working group agreed to a number of inter-sessional activities in this area, including workshops and demonstrations of the CSCE's system of military exchanges of information and prenotification of certain military activities; communications CBMs; incidents at sea, and search and rescue; and declaratory CBMs and long-term objectives. In addition, representatives of the states have participated in site-visits to NATO bases and observed exercises to learn about the measures adopted by the CSCE. In November 1993, the participants agreed to a regional communications system, linked to the CSCE network.<sup>5</sup>

However, in 1994, the ACRS negotiations slowed (or stopped) in the wake of Egyptian demands for immediate discussion of the Israeli nuclear capability and agreement on a timetable for negotiation of a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. Some Arab officials have also called for Israel to include some statement or action regarding its ambiguous nuclear deterrent option in the context of a CBM.<sup>6</sup> However, from an Israeli perspective, the nuclear deterrent option is a vital factor in national security policy, and changes in this policy would have far reaching implications. As a result, such changes are outside the context of CBMs or other declaratory measures. This difference in perspective has been a basic obstacle to resuming discussions in the ACRS forum.

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<sup>4</sup> Fact Sheet on Middle East Arms Control Initiative, The White House Office of the Press Secretary, Washington, DC, May 29 1991

<sup>5</sup> For detailed analyses of the activities of the ACRS working group, see Practical Peacemaking in the Middle East, Vol. I, Arms Control and Regional Security, Steven L. Spiegel and David J. Pervin, editors, Garland, New York, 1995; Gerald Steinberg, "Arms Control and Regional Security in the Middle East", Survival, Spring, 1994; Joel Peters, Building Bridges: The Arab-Israeli Multilateral Talks, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1994; Peter Jones, "Arms Control in the Middle East", Security Dialogue, Vol. 28, No. 1, March 1997

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Abdallah Hammudah and Sawsan Abu Husayn, "Interview with Foreign Minister Amr Musa", Al-Sharq Al-awsat (London), 24 August 1995, p.7 in FBIS-NES-95-167 (29 August 1995), p.9; Bruce W. Jentleson, "The Middle East Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Talks: Progress, Problems, Prospects", Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California, Policy Paper 26, 1996.

In addition, other frameworks for discussion of regional security have been created, including the Mediterranean Dialogue in the context of the OSCE, and the Euro-Med process of the European Union. The participants in both groups are limited geographically -- the OSCE dialogue includes Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, and Algeria, and the Euro-Med also includes Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinians, as well as non-EU members Turkey, Cyprus, and Malta. Discussions in these frameworks focus on environmental and economic cooperation, and in these may contribute to the development of CBMs in these areas. However, they are unlikely to lead to breakthroughs regarding the development of regional security.

### **Arms Control Efforts in the Middle East**

As noted, arms control agreements are also important pillars of regional security arrangements, and were central to the development of the post-Cold War European security system. In 1987, the Intermediate Nuclear Forces agreement, eliminating nuclear armed ballistic missiles from Europe, marked a major milestone in the development of this system.

In the Middle East, the first arms control efforts began in 1948, when the US imposed a unilateral ban on arms sales to Israel and Egypt, and the UN declared an embargo on weapons transfers to all of the combatants as part of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. These efforts were largely ineffective. After the armistice, the US, France, and Britain announced a coordinated effort to "regulate the flow of arms" to the region. This Tripartite Declaration was formalized in May 1950, and led to the establishment of the Near East Arms Coordinating Committee. However, the extensive regional interests of all three powers in the region, and the competition between them, undermined the effectiveness of the Declaration. In reality, the major effect of the Declaration was to prevent Israel from obtaining weapons during this period. Later efforts to regulate arms exports to the Middle East were also unsuccessful.<sup>7</sup>

Although various Middle Eastern conventional arms control measures were proposed during the 1960s, particularly after the 1967 war, they had little impact. During this period, the focus shifted to nuclear arms limitations, both globally and also in the Middle East. The Egyptian government began to focus on the Israeli nuclear policy, and introduced a number of initiatives that were designed to pressure Israel into accepting safeguards and limitations on the Dimona nuclear center, and to isolate Israel politically.

In the 1974 annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, Egypt and Iran proposed the establishment of a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. This issue has been discussed continuously since then, not only in the UN, but also in the meetings of the International Atomic Energy Agency and other frameworks. All the states in the region, including Israel, have declared themselves in favor of an NWFZ, although the terms of reference vary. The Egyptians seek immediate agreement, and verification

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<sup>7</sup> Yair Evron, "The Role of Arms Control in the Middle East," Adelphi Paper 138, IISS London, UK, 1977; Gerald M. Steinberg, "The Middle East", in Encyclopedia of Arms Control and Disarmament, Richard Dean Burns, editor, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993; Michael Oren "The Tripartite System and Arms Control in the Middle East, in Arms Control in the Middle East, edited by Dore Gold (Boulder, Colo. Westview, and Tel Aviv University, JCSS Study No. 15, 1990)

by the IAEA in the context of the NPT (essentially reducing the regional NWFZ to a branch of the NPT). Under the Egyptian proposal, Israel would be forced to accept safeguards on the Dimona complex (thereby ending the policy of nuclear ambiguity initiated by Ben Gurion). Israeli policy links discussion of a NWFZ to the prior establishment of regional peace agreements including all states in the region, agreement and implementation of arms limitations in other areas, including conventional weapons, and verification would be based on mutual inspection and independent of the IAEA and NPT structure.<sup>8</sup>

In 1988, following another Egyptian initiative, the United Nations General Assembly created a committee to examine the issue. The report was published in October 1990, and explicitly examines the terms required for “effective and verifiable measures” which would facilitate the establishment of a NWFZ. The committee discussed the problems of defining the states to be included, suggesting that all the members of the Arab League, as well as Iran, Israel and perhaps Pakistan be included. The report also discusses the need for a system of “verification and control”, noting the weaknesses of the IAEA safeguards in guaranteeing compliance with the terms of the NWFZ. The UN report concluded that the negotiation of a NWFZ must be related to other measures “to reduce the danger of hostilities and to strengthen Israeli confidence that a true and lasting peace was being built.”<sup>9</sup>

As noted above, after the 1991 Gulf War, the US proposed extensive arms control measures for the Middle East. The 1991 Bush Initiative included a call for talks among the five major suppliers (the US, Russia, France, China, and the UK) of conventional arms on guidelines for limits on transfers of conventional arms and for a “general code of responsible arms transfers”, and indeed, some meetings were held but no agreements were reached.

In addition, there have been some discussions on regional ballistic missile limitations, and the Bush Initiative called for “a freeze on the acquisition, production, and testing of surface-to-surface missiles by states in the region with a view to the ultimate elimination of such missiles from their arsenals.” The potential for a regional ballistic missile limitation agreement was also considered briefly in the ACRS framework.

In the 1980s, following the Iraqi use of chemical weapons against Iran and against the Kurds during the first Gulf War, and the revelations regarding the extent of the Iraqi nuclear weapons and missile programs, the Egyptian government introduced the concept of a Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction (the “Mubarak Plan”). In all other respects, including verification and demands regarding immediate Israeli acceptance of the NPT, this proposal maintained the traditional Egyptian positions regarding verification and Israeli accession to the NPT.

As noted, verification is a major factor in arms control negotiations in general, and in the Middle East, in particular. The Iraqi case demonstrated

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<sup>8</sup> Avi Becker, "A Regional Non-Proliferation Treaty for the Middle East", Security or Armageddon: Israel's Nuclear Strategy, Louis Rene Beres, editor, Lexington, Ma., Lexington Books, 1985

<sup>9</sup> Establishment of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Region of the Middle East Study on effective and verifiable measures which would facilitate the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Report of the Secretary General, United Nations General Assembly, A/45/435, 10 October 1990. See also Geoffrey Kemp, The Control of the Middle East Arms Race, Carnegie Endowment, Washington DC, 1992.

that in closed states with large areas in which to hide illegal facilities and materials, the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, based on the NPT and the IAEA, is limited in its capability to detect and deter violations of safeguards and agreed limits. Furthermore, even the far more intrusive UNSCOM system of inspections was blocked by Iraq, while some members of the UN Security Council, notably Russia, and to a lesser degree, France, urged relaxation of the sanctions despite Iraqi blatant non-compliance. In response, it is clear that for the Middle East, in particular, a dedicated regional verification regime, consisting of all the states in the region, is necessary for effective verification and safeguards.

As a result of these factors, in combination, the discussions of arms control in the Middle East became political contests between Egypt and Israel, with little substantive activity. In many ways, this is similar to the political confrontations between the US and Soviet Union over arms control in the 1950s and 1960s. In the case of the Middle East, these confrontations take place in annual meetings of the United Nations First Committee and General Assembly, the International Atomic Energy Agency, ACRS, and specialized meetings such as the 1995 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Extension Conference.<sup>10</sup> In addition to effort to isolate and pressure Israel politically, the Egyptian campaign was also designed to reduce the Israeli military capabilities to what Egypt viewed as “normal proportions”, forcing Israel to relinquish its qualitative and technological superiority.<sup>11</sup>

The ACRS process reached an impasse in 1994, during a meeting in Doha, Qatar, in which the participants discussed a declaration of principles to serve a role similar to that of the 1975 Helsinki Final Statement. Disagreements between Israel and Egypt over the language of the section on nuclear weapons led to the suspension of the ACRS talks. Since then, Egypt has consistently refused to participate in CSBMs or discuss other issues.

### **Israeli Policies on Regional Security**

The Israeli government has historically viewed regional security and arms control proposals with major misgivings and skepticism. Previous efforts, including the Tripartite Declaration of the 1950s and the NPT/IAEA regime for nuclear proliferation, were unsuccessful from the Israeli perspective.<sup>12</sup> At best, arms control was seen as an idealistic irrelevance to the Middle East, and, at worst, a means of depriving Israel of its deterrent capability or isolating it politically and diplomatically.<sup>13</sup> Israel was and is not a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (among an increasingly smaller group of non-signatories) and was not an active participant in global arms control negotiations. Despite the pressure from both the states in the region, led by Egypt, and from the rest of the world, successive Israeli

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<sup>10</sup> Gerald M. Steinberg, “The 1995 NPT Extension and Review Conference and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process”, *NonProliferation Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Fall 1996; see also Shai Feldman, *Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East*, MIT Press, 1997

<sup>11</sup> Ariel E. Levite and Emily B. Landau, *In the Eyes of the Arabs: Israel's Nuclear Image* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1994)

<sup>12</sup> Michael B. Oren, “The Tripartite System and Arms Control in the Middle East: 1950-1956”, in *Arms Control in the Middle East*, Dore Gold, editor, (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990)

<sup>13</sup> Shalhevet Freier, “A Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East and Effective Verification”, in *Disarmament: A periodic review by the United Nations*, Volume XVI, No. 3, 1993, pp.66-91.

governments have rejected the efforts for force an end to the nuclear option by adhering to the NPT, and this position is unlikely to change.

As the political and strategic role of arms limitation initiatives increased, Israeli national security interests were increasingly effected. The Bush Initiative and the beginning of the ACRS process forced Israel to abandon its traditionally passive role and develop specific policies in response. In addition, the expansion of the nuclear proliferation regime, including the nuclear suppliers' agreements, and the formation of other suppliers' groups increasingly effected Israeli security interests, its relations with the US (the primary supporter of these activities), and access to advanced weapons and technology. In 1987, the US led the formation of the Missile Technology Control Regime, which created a suppliers' group in this area as well. The purpose was to limit the proliferation of ballistic missile technology to Third World states, and Israel was pressed by the US to accept the terms of the MTCR. In addition, the growing awareness of the dangers of chemical weapons led to the formation of the Australia Group (a suppliers' regime in the area of chemical agents), and also the negotiation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

As a result, the Israeli government developed a comprehensive policy for regional security and arms control, based on three objectives. First, CSBMs and arms control are seen as directly linked to the peace process.<sup>14</sup> Progress is closely coupled to the negotiations, and change in Israel's nuclear policy will come at the end, after all the states in the region explicitly accept the legitimacy of the Jewish state, and formal peace agreements are signed, and not through other forums unlinked to these changes. Second, limitations must provide a tangible reduction in the military threat, conventional and unconventional, to Israel. Continued instability and crises in the region are incompatible with arms control. Third, limitation agreements must include realistic provisions for verification and solutions to the problem of "breakout" (the sudden unilateral abrogation of limitations, leading to a weapons capability within a very short period).

In early 1993, after intensive debate, Prime Minister Rabin and the cabinet adopted this policy, emphasizing confidence and security-building measures, as well as limits on chemical and biological weapons, missiles, and conventional weapons. The policy reaffirmed the decision that any change in Israel's nuclear status would come at in the last and distant stage of the process.<sup>15</sup> The Rabin Government agreed to sign the CWC, although ratification was contingent on the policies of the Arab states and other factors.

In January 1993, Foreign Minister Peres presented a comprehensive summary of this policy. He noted the priority of measures designed "to build and nurture mutual confidence between states, .... to diminish the levels of suspicion, hostility and conflagration", and discussed applications in the area of preventing surprise attacks and in crisis management. "No nation in the region will enjoy genuine security unless all nations feel secure. Accordingly,

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<sup>14</sup> Ariel E. Levite, "Confidence and Security Building Measures in the Middle East", in Conference of Research Institutes in the Middle East: Proceedings of the Cairo conference (18-20 April 1993). New York : United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Address by the Foreign Minister of Israel, Mr. Shimon Peres at the Signing Ceremony of the Chemical Weapons Convention Treaty, Paris, 13 January 1993 (Jerusalem: Foreign Ministry)

we have formulated our policy on regional security and arms control, once peace has been attained.” Peres specifically endorsed “a mutually verifiable zone, free of surface-to-surface missiles and of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. ... To reduce the conventional arms race and military buildup and prevent non-conventional proliferation, the suppliers and exporters should cease their counterproductive policies of indiscriminate arms sales.” He explicitly noted that “Arms control negotiations and arrangements should be mutually agreed upon and include all the states of the region. Implementation and verification mechanisms, the establishment of comprehensive and durable peace, should be region-wide in their application. Priority in this process ought to be assigned to systems whose destabilizing potential and effects have been proven through their use in wars and have inflicted mass casualties.”<sup>16</sup>

These principles have been repeated by many different officials. In 1995, David Ivri, who served as Director-General of the Ministry of Defense and headed the Israeli delegation to ACRS gave a major policy speech in which he reiterated the Israeli policy. Ivri noted that arms control and regional security arrangements are “an integral part of the effort to bring peace, stability and security to our entire region.” Repeating the emphasis on the establishment of CSBMs as a first step, Ivri called for agreement on naval measures such as the prevention of accidents at sea and cooperation in search and rescue (SAR); on pre-notification of exercises and large scale troop movements, as well as clarification of unusual military activities. and dialogue between national security academies and general staff colleagues, and other educational military institutions. He also reiterated the Israeli position on a NWFZ, stating that “Israel will endeavor, upon the establishment of relations of peace, that the states of the region should jointly establish a mutually verifiable zone free of ground-to-ground missiles, of chemical weapons, of biological weapons, and of nuclear weapons.”<sup>17</sup>

On October 3 1996, Foreign Minister David Levi restated the Israeli position before the United Nations: “After peaceful relations and reconciliation have been establishment among all states in the region, Israeli will endeavor to establish in the Middle East a zone free of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, as well as ballistic missiles, based on mutual and effective verification. Negotiations to establish such a zone will commence following the signing of bilateral peace accords between Israel and all states in the region.”<sup>18</sup>

In 1997, the Director-General of the Foreign Ministry, Eytan Bentsur, addressed the Conference on Disarmament, providing a broad overview of Israeli policy on arms control issues, in which these positions were updated and the Israeli approach to regional security was explained in detail. Bentsur repeated the Israeli goal “that the day will come within a regional security framework encompassing all countries of the Middle East .. will be realized to

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<sup>16</sup>Address by the Foreign Minister of Israel, Mr. Shimon Peres at the Signing Ceremony of the Chemical Weapons Convention Treaty, Paris, 13 January 1993 (Jerusalem: Foreign Ministry)

<sup>17</sup>David Ivry, The Israeli-Jordanian Peace Treaty As A Model For Regional Security And Arms Control Arrangements In The Middle East, Annual Conference of the Washington Institute For Near East Policy, Amman, Jordan, September 10, 1995

<sup>18</sup>Speech delivered by Foreign Minister David Levi, United Nations General Assembly, October 3 1996 (text provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem)

provide a cooperative multilateral response to all the security problems of the Middle East.”<sup>19</sup>

Crisis management and measures to prevent surprise attack remain the highest priority in the Israeli perception of the CSBM process. In his formal statement of Israeli policy, Bentsur termed CSBMs as first steps, designed to “increase openness and build trust and cooperation thereby making a significant contribution to ease tensions, reduce the prospects of surprise attacks, diminish the levels of suspicion and prevent armed conflict. The trust that will be built, and the parallel progress in the bilateral peace process between Israel and its neighbours, will enable the beginning of negotiations on more ambitious arms control measures.”<sup>20</sup>

Recent events have reinforced the emphasis placed on such measures, as well as demonstrating their importance. In 1996 and 1997, tension following the movement of a Syrian helicopter-borne brigade from Beirut to the area below the Israeli early warning station at the foot of Mt. Hermon in the Golan triggered a series of crises and alerts. On both sides of the border, Syrian and Israeli forces were reinforced. In addition, a member of the Israeli intelligence network claimed (falsely) to have evidence of a planned Syrian attack. At this stage, Syria requested an immediate inspection by the UN forces to insure that Israel was honoring the terms of the 1974 disengagement agreement. After this inspection, the level of tension decreased and the crisis was resolved peacefully.

Another important aspect of the confidence building process is the mutual understanding of different security concerns and threat perceptions. In the ACRS process, discussions of such concerns and perceptions began, but did not make much progress. In this and other frameworks, Israel has noted the impact of the asymmetry of geography, demography, and force structures in the region, and the need to address these asymmetries as part of any regional security process. Geographically and demographically, Israel as well as other small states face distinct security requirements. Larger states such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran have both a large measure of strategic depth in which to absorb conventional attacks as well as large populations for continuing a conflict. These countries also have very large standing forces, while Israel relies on the mobilization of reserve forces in order to provide a defense against large scale conventional attack. In discussions with Syria regarding possible disengagement agreements linked to a peace treaty, Israel has suggested that Syria reduce its standing forces significantly (currently twice as large as the Israeli standing army) to lower the potential for surprise attack.

As noted above, limits on the Israeli nuclear capability are seen as part of the final stage in the peace process, and policy makers have rejected pressures to sign the NPT and acceptance of inspection of Dimona that are independent of an end to the threats to national survival and continued

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<sup>19</sup> Israel’s Approach to Regional Security, Arms Control, and Disarmament, Statement by H.E. Mr. Eytan Bentsur, Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel Before the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, September 4 1997

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rejection of Israeli legitimacy on the part of some states in the region. They argue that if Israel gives up this deterrence option, the Arab states would turn to war again. (Indeed, some Israeli analysts and leaders argue that the nuclear potential was a major factor in convincing Sadat and other Arab leaders that they could not hope to eliminate Israeli militarily.<sup>10</sup>) Thus, although Israel has endorsed the concept of a NWFZ in principle, actual discussions and negotiations on this issue are the last stage of the process, as outlined in the government's policy statements.

### **The Obstacles to Regional Security in the Middle East**

In Europe, the CSCE provides a very visible example of successful conflict amelioration and the development of institutions and frameworks for conflict resolution and prevention, based on careful balancing of diverse national interests. However, as noted above, the political conditions that allowed for the establishment of a useful regional security framework in Europe do not exist currently in the Middle East. The sweeping agreements in Europe only became possible after fundamental political change in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Gorbachev's rise to power, his decision to make political and economic changes, and the policies of "glasnost" and "perestroika" began a process that led to the end of Soviet control of Eastern Europe. This, in turn, ended the confrontation with the US and the West, increased openness and individual freedom within the USSR, and, in the longer term, resulted in the demise of the Soviet empire. These were essential conditions for the success of the CSCE, and without the radical changes within the Soviet Union, these regional security agreements would not have been possible.

Politically, many states in the Middle East are still in the pre-perestroika era, and the conditions for that were central to the CSCE process do not yet exist. Conflict still dominates over cooperation, and the concept of security based on shared interests in stability and peaceful transition, and "the language of assurance"<sup>21</sup>, rather than on threats and violence, is not widely accepted. The essential requirements for arms limitation and tension reductions measures have not been created. Some key states, such as Syria, Iraq, and Iran are refusing to participate in the ACRS process, and in some cases, and seeking to sabotage these activities. Among the Arab states and the Palestinians, the concept of a shared Arab identity is still powerful, and such an exclusive perspective is inconsistent with regional security frameworks.

Finally, many of the sources of instability in the region are the result of internal political, religious, social and economic conflicts. While such domestic turmoil has and could still lead to violence between states, these sources cannot generally be addressed by regional security structures.<sup>22</sup> Under these conditions, efforts to implement more ambitious regional security measures are premature.

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<sup>21</sup> Michael N. Barnett, Regional Security after the Gulf War, *Political Science Quarterly*, 111:4, (1996/7), p. 597, 599

<sup>22</sup> Michael N. Barnett, Regional Security after the Gulf War, *Political Science Quarterly*, 111:4, (1996/7), p. 598

### **The immediate objectives of the CBM process**

In order to succeed, the CBM/CSBM process in the Southern Mediterranean and Middle East must be based on an incremental process of creating institutions for communications, crisis management (including additional hot-lines between national capitals), measures to prevent surprise attack, and other CSBMs. The joint naval search and rescue exercises that took place in January 1998, involving forces from Turkey, the US and Israel, with Jordanian observers, provides an example of the type of CSBM that can be implemented. On this basis, additional states from the region can be expected to participate in the future, as the core of a regional structure develops gradually, consistent with the broader political and security-based environment.

With official contacts limited, track two meetings involving academics, journalists, union leaders, and professional groups can play a central role in changing perceptions, and helping to remove misunderstandings. Functionalist cooperation in less sensitive areas, such as economic and environment projects, can create a basis for mutual tolerance, and even, eventually, perhaps shared perceptions and recognition of mutual interests. Such tolerance building measures are central for the process of conflict prevention and eventual resolution.

As noted above, the instabilities and mutual fears of surprise attack need immediate attention. The Golan crisis in the Fall of 1996 demonstrate the fragility of the situation and the need for measures to prevent surprise attack. The OSCE's measures regarding prenotification and limitations of military exercises provide an important model for the Middle East, and should be given increased attention. Similarly, agreed measures for crisis management and the operation of a crisis management center similar to the OSCE's center would also mark a major contribution to preventing war and extending the long-term basis for peaceful resolution of conflicts in the region. In addition, agreement on a code of conduct, as has been discussed under the auspices of the European Union's special Middle East representative would be an important measure towards increasing mutual acceptance and legitimacy.

The European experience provides a strong foundation for contributing to the development of these CBMs and CSBMs. However, if the focus of efforts goes beyond these measures, to more complex measures, without the necessary preliminary agreements and cooperative experience, the results could be counterproductive. Thus, the European involvement must be considered carefully and cautiously.