

Establishing a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East: Prospects and Challenges

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Norwegian Summary

Til tross for at etableringen av en masseødeleggelsesvåpenfri sone (WMDFZ) i Midtøsten både har vært på den internasjonale og den regionale dagsordenen i over 30 år, har en slik sone ennå ikke blitt opprettet. Vanskelighetene med å opprette en WMDFZ i denne regionen blir ofte ansett for å være et resultat av de mellomstatlige konfliktene og ”sikkerhetsdilemmaet” som dominerer regional sikkerhetspolitikk. Midtøsten er en av verdens mest militariserte og konfliktfylte regioner, og regional samhandling er i stor grad karakterisert av ustabilitet og konkurranse. Disse forholdene har ført til at flere stater gjennom tidene har ønsket å skaffe seg masseødeleggelsesvåpen.

Denne rapporten fokuserer på sikkerhetspolitiske utfordringer i forhold til opprettelsen av en WMDFZ og på drivkreftene bak staters ønsker om å anskaffe masseødeleggelsesvåpen. Hovedfokus er på posisjonene til regionale nøkkelstater og hvilke stridsspørsmål som må løses for å øke mulighetene til å opprette en regional sone. Rapporten gir en detaljert analyse av landspesifikke og regionale utfordringer til etableringen av en WMDFZ, og konsentrerer seg om de fire statene Egypt, Iran, Israel og Syria.

Motivene for anskaffelsen av masseødeleggelsesvåpen varierer mellom ulike land og ulike tidsrom, og innebærer alt fra krav om økt sikkerhet til ønsker om å øke nasjonal prestisje. Selv om alle regionale stater har uttrykt støtte til opprettelsen av en WMDFZ, så har det ikke blitt iverksatt noen regionale tillitsbyggende tiltak eller noen nedrustningsavtale for ikke-konvensjonelle våpen. Den multilaterale arbeidsgruppen Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) forsøkte å sette fokus på disse sakene, men dette forumet har ikke vært samlet på over ti år. Utfallet av tidligere forslag har også hovedsakelig vært avhengig av utviklingen i fredsprosessen mellom Israel og de andre statene. Det er imidlertid et stort behov for nedrustningstiltak, spesielt på bakgrunn av frykten for Irans potensielle kjernevåpenprogram, som i sin tur kan føre til at andre stater velger å ruste opp.

Det er stor uenighet om hvordan man skal nå målet om å opprette en WMDFZ i Midtøsten. Dette er først og fremst en forskjell mellom Israel og resten av statene i regionen. Israel anser sin tvetydige kjernevåpendoktrine som essensiell for landets sikkerhet frem til en omfattende fredsavtale er signert, mens de andre statene ikke nødvendigvis ser en automatisk kobling mellom en fredsavtale og en WMDFZ. Rapporten hevder at opprettelsen av en WMDFZ er en langsiktig prosess, og at fremgang i nedrustningsspørsmålene ikke nødvendigvis bør være avhengig av fremgang i fredsprosessen. I rapporten blir det også diskutert noen forslag som kan bedre forbindelsene mellom statene og øke mulighetene for å opprette en WMDFZ. En anbefaling er å lære fra tidligere arbeid for å redusere usikkerhet i andre regioner, som for eksempel å anvende kunnskap om betingelsene for opprettelsen av eksisterende kjernevåpenfrie soner. Opprettelsen av en WMDFZ er også avhengig av eksterne aktørers evne til å skape insentiver, megle mellom statene og håndheve en eventuell avtale. Arbeid for å øke samhandling mellom regionale eliter, forskningsaktiviteter og tillitsbyggende tiltak, kan spille en viktig rolle i å øke regionale lederes erfaring i samarbeid og deres kunnskap om nedrustning.

English Summary

Even though the issue of creating a weapons of mass destruction free zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East has been on international as well as regional agendas for more than 30 years, it has yet to approach realization. This difficulty of realization is most commonly considered to be a result of the inter-state conflicts and the “security dilemma” that dominate regional security policies. To a large degree, the Middle Eastern security environment is characterized by instability and rivalry, and it is one of the most heavily armed regions in the world. This situation has led to efforts to obtain weapons of mass destruction.

This report focuses on political, security and arms challenges to the creation of a WMDFZ, and on states’ incentives or disincentives to proliferate. The main focus is on the positions of key regional states, and the issues of contention that have to be resolved in order to improve the possibility of creating a regional WMDFZ. The report provides an in-depth analysis of country-specific and regional challenges to the creation of a WMDFZ, focusing on the four key states Egypt, Iran, Israel and Syria.

The rationales behind proliferation vary with countries and time periods, ranging from security considerations to the desire to increase national prestige. Although all regional states have stated their support for a WMDFZ, no regional confidence-building measures have been implemented, and no region-wide disarmament treaty on non-conventional weapons has been concluded. The multilateral working group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) attempted to address these issues, but this forum has not been assembled for more than ten years. The result of previous proposals has largely been coupled with developments in the Arab-Israeli peace process. At the same time, fears of Iran’s potential nuclear weapons programme have increased the need for non-proliferation measures, because the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran could make other states more likely to proliferate.

Large differences remain on how to reach the goal of establishing a WMDFZ. This is especially a difference between Israel and the rest of the regional states. For Israel, the nuclear option is perceived as essential for its security until a comprehensive peace treaty is signed, while the other states do not necessarily see an automatic link between a WMDFZ and a peace agreement. This report suggests that creating a WMDFZ is a long-term process, and achieving progress on disarmament should not necessarily be dependent on progress in the peace process. It also proposes a few steps to improve inter-state relations and the possibility of establishing a WMDFZ. One proposal is learning from practical steps taken in other regions to reduce insecurity, such as utilizing the knowledge on the conditions leading to the establishment of existing nuclear weapons free zones. The establishment of a WMDFZ is also dependent on the ability of external actors, such as the United States, the EU, Russia and the United Nations to provide incentives, mediation and enforcement. Promoting elite interaction, research activities and confidence-building measures should also be given high priority, so that regional leaders increase both their experience in working together to achieve regional goals and their knowledge of disarmament-related issues.

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1 Introduction

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) represents a serious threat to national security and international stability. This has led many states to take steps to prevent the further spread of such weapons and to create conditions for their removal (Scheinman 1999: 1). In the Middle East, the list of arms control efforts is long in terms of initiatives, but the results of these efforts have so far been limited (Steinberg 2005: 487). Thus, although the issue of a weapons of mass destruction free zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East “has been on international as well as regional agendas for 30 years, it has yet to even approach realization” (Baumgart and Müller 2004-05: 45). The failures are most commonly considered to be a result of the inter-state conflicts and the “security dilemma” that dominate regional security policies. The regional conflict zones are complex and overlapping, and include the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Shi’a-Sunni division, and tensions in the Persian Gulf (Steinberg 2005: 488). Although there has been some progress in the Arab-Israeli conflict, as reflected in the peace treaties between Israel and its Egyptian and Jordanian neighbours, not all actors have supported this trend (for example Iran and Syria) (Scheinman 1999: 3). To a large degree, the Middle Eastern security environment is therefore characterised by instability and rivalry, and it is one of the most heavily armed regions in the world. This situation has also led to efforts to obtain weapons of mass destruction.

Analyses of Middle Eastern security policies are often dominated by a focus on national security, the security dilemma, and inter-state conflicts. Although these issues are highly important, scholars have pointed to other factors that also influence whether a state decides to conform to non-proliferation or not. According to Scheinman (1999: 3), “one or more of three explanations – national security; global or regional status and prestige; and domestic political reasons ... – usually account for national decisions on whether to join and comply with non-proliferation treaties and regimes”. It has also been argued that Middle East *insecurity* operates at three interrelated levels: the domestic, regional and international (Fawcett 2005: 174). In order to obtain a holistic account of major challenges and opportunities regarding a weapons of mass destruction free zone, this report examines the relative importance of three levels of analysis: *domestic political explanations, state-to-state relations, and the impact of global powers* (Fawcett 2005: 174; Buzan and Wæver 2003). The report therefore focuses on political, security and arms challenges to the creation of a WMDFZ in the Middle East, and on specific states’ incentives or disincentives to proliferate. The main focus is on the positions of key regional states, and the issues of contention that have to be resolved in order to improve the possibility of creating a regional WMDFZ.

The starting point for this report is the FFI report by Holøien (2006) on WMDFZs in the Middle East and options for cooperative arrangements. Using that report as a frame of reference, this report provides an in-depth analysis of country-specific and regional challenges to the creation of a WMDFZ, focusing on the four key states Egypt, Iran, Israel and Syria.

1.1 Structure of the Report

The first part of the report contains an outline of the main conflicts that shape inter-state relations in the Middle East. Following this is a chapter describing the status of WMD Treaties and possible WMD programs in the Middle East, a brief examination of existing WMDFZ, and an outline of WMDFZ initiatives in the Middle East. The next chapter analyses challenges to establishing a WMDFZ by examining the policy positions of Egypt, Israel, Iran and Syria. The structure of each discussion is organized freely around the possible impact of inter-state relations, the role of global powers and domestic politics. The final chapter contains a discussion of the implications of the current regional security environment for creating a setting conducive for establishing a WMDFZ. In the concluding chapter, a few steps for future research and for more practical approaches to influence the involved actors are suggested.

1.2 Defining the Middle East

Defining the Middle East is a politically sensitive activity, and the definitions vary. According to Buzan and Wæver (2003: 187), patterns of security interdependence define the region to stretch from Morocco to Iran, including all of the Arab states plus Israel and Iran. However, this report will be based on the definition used by the previous FFI report on establishing a WMDFZ in the Middle East (Holøien 2006). Figure 1.1 outlines the geographical scope of Holøien's (2006) "all at once" model, which includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. It also largely coincides with the IAEA's definition of the Middle East from 1989, which based the selection of states on



Source: Middle East Atlas.

Figure 1.1 The Middle East.

existing regional tensions and the ability to develop WMD (Holøien 2006: 26; Othman and Abdulrahim 2004: 108).

As previously stated, this report focuses on the security policies and weapons programs of Egypt, Israel, Iran and Syria. According to the geographical scope for WMDFZ in Holøien (2006), Egypt, Israel and Syria are part of the Levant Model, while Iran belongs to the Gulf Model. Although including states from both zones in this study makes the security dynamics more complicated, it recognises that it is difficult to establish a WMDFZ without the simultaneous entrance of all states. However, the focus on these four states does not necessarily rule out the potential effectiveness of the two other models, which “are based on the realization that the geographical scope of a Middle East WMDFZ should grow out of a core that only includes a few states” (Holøien 2006: 24).

Egypt, Israel and Syria are included because they are key actors in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which to a large degree determine the character of inter-state relations. Egypt is a major regional actor and has a peace agreement with Israel. Syria and Israel have not been able to make peace, and are involved in a territorial conflict about control over the Golan Heights. Iran, the leading Shiite state, has regional power ambitions which make many of its neighbours insecure. Iran is also the state that currently is most hostile to Israel on both an ideological and a political level. In terms of security policy and patterns of enmity, focusing on these states may provide valuable insights on the constraints on establishing a WMDFZ. In addition, all of the states may have a varying degree of WMD capabilities, which makes them key actors in disarmament processes.

The Arab North African states Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco are not included in the “all at once” model because they can be parties to the Treaty of Pelindaba, seeking to establish a NWFZ in Africa. Algeria has ratified the treaty, but most Arab North African states have not ratified it (OPANAL website). Over the past years, the North African states have become marginal players in the Arab-Israeli peace process, and have “drifted away from the core, relating less to Arab issues, and becoming more like an independent RSC [regional security complex] in its own right” (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 213). Although cultural and religious ties to the rest of the Middle East remain strong, the security interdependence between North Africa and the region is weak. Although Egypt is also situated in North Africa, it is included in the Levant model because of its important position in the Arab-Israeli conflict (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 191).

2 Regional Security Dynamics

The Middle East has been described as “one of the most complex and difficult regions in the world for developing a common strategic language leading to mutual security for all states in the region” (Cserveny 2004: 77). The climate of insecurity in the region is based on

“governments with tenuous legitimacy, territorial disputes, the unsettled fate of the Palestinians, Sunni-Shiite tensions, intra-Arab rivalry, and a mix of chemical, biological,

and nuclear weapons programs ... that raise the stakes of any potential conflict” (Perkovich et al. 2005: 178).

The Arab-Israeli conflict is at the core of the region’s high militarization, and has shaped the mindset and identity of both Arabs and Israelis (Korany 2005: 64; Cohen 1999). This mindset is deeply rooted in perceptions of threat and enmity, “us” versus “them”, shaped by historical memories of trauma and disasters (Cohen 1999: 77). The conflict can be traced back to the Palestinian question following the Balfour Declaration (1917) that “obliged Britain to support the creation of a Jewish state against the wishes of the Palestinian Arab inhabitants” (Smith 2005: 218). The Palestinian question has been an important factor in both inter-Arab rivalries and Arab-Israeli tensions. On the Israeli side, the conflict has promoted a siege mentality, giving rise to a “garrison state” marked by Arab confrontational rhetoric and the trauma of the holocaust (Cohen 1999: 77). In response to a perceived existential threat, a philosophy of self-reliance has therefore emerged. On the Arab side, Zionism has been perceived as “aggressive, expansive, and brutal, as evidenced by the catastrophe of 1948” (Cohen 1999: 78). Seeing themselves as victims of Zionist aggression, many Arab states have refused to recognise Israel, hoping for a correction of what they view as an historical injustice.

Six major wars have taken place in the past involving Israel and its Arab neighbours: in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1968-70, 1973 and 1982. The first war broke out just after the state of Israel was proclaimed in May 1948, with an attack on the fledgling state carried out by the Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian, Iraqi and Lebanese armies (Cleveland 2000: 260). In the Suez Crisis of 1956, Egypt was attacked by Israel, Britain and France. Then followed the war in 1967, the 1968-70 War of Attrition between Egypt and Israel, the 1973 October War¹, and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon (Smith 2005: 217). In addition, two Palestinian *intifadas* or uprisings erupted in 1987 and 2000, resulting in escalating violence and large numbers of casualties. Through the past wars, Egypt assumed the role of officially defending Palestinian rights, and sought to regain the territories captured by Israel. On the other hand, Israel sought to defend itself from what they saw as attempts to destroy the state. One of the main conflicts between Egypt and Israel can therefore be understood as “a fundamental disagreement about what constituted a legitimate status quo” (Stein 2005: 207). The Israel-Palestine conflict has also been characterized by much of the same dynamics that influenced the relationship between Egypt and Israel (Stein 2005: 209). However, the conflict is even more intense, since both peoples claim the right to part or all of the same territory. The wars have, however, been followed by peace treaties between Israel and two of its neighbours. Two of the most important military powers, Egypt and Israel, have been at peace since the late 1970s, while Jordan made peace with Israel in 1994 (Cordesman 2004: 135).

One of the main issues giving rise to the region’s insecurities is thus based on an ethnic formula, that is, an ethnic cleavage of Arab versus “others” (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 190). In addition, Israel can be differentiated religiously from its Arab (mostly Sunni Islamic) neighbours, and Iran (representing Shi’a Islam). Hence, for both Israel and Iran, a dispute with an Arab state may risk becoming a dispute with all its Arab neighbours. However, according to Valbjørn and Bank

¹ Known in Israel as the Yom Kippur War.

(2007: 11), the renewed Sunni-Shi'a split after the 2006 Lebanon War "bears many signs of ... regime-led orchestration" to secure political interests, rather than being religiously based. In society at large, this sectarian divide is difficult to recognize. For example, during the 2006 war, sympathies developed between the Sunni Hamas and Shi'a Hizballah, and Sunni populations expressed support for Hizballah during the conflict (Valbjørn and Bank 2007: 6). The region is also characterized by inter-Arab and inter-Islamic differences in agendas, and Arab nationalism can be said to have created more inter-Arab rivalry than cooperation. In addition to struggles over leadership of the Arab world and conflicts over the interpretation of Arabism, Arab nationalism has also given rise to more traditional rivalries over water, ideology, clan interests and royal successions (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 190).

Regional inter-state relations have also been characterized by different states' aspirations to become the dominating state. Egypt has traditionally been regarded as the "natural" leader of the Arab world, especially during Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency (1954-1970) (Fawcett 2005: 174). Saudi Arabia has also aimed at regional leadership, using claims of religious legitimacy and the power and influence accrued from its oil resources as tools to increase its regional standing. Furthermore, Syria, Iraq and Iran have used military and nationalist approaches to increase their regional dominance. During the 1950s and 1960s, the main alliance pattern was one separating between the states aligned with the United States or Great Britain (Jordan, Saudi Arabia) and the non-aligned states (Egypt, Syria). Later on during the Cold War, Egypt and Syria were linked to the Soviet Union, while Jordan and Israel identified themselves with the Western powers. The Cold War in the region had a distinct Arab dimension, in which the "conservative" monarchical states Jordan and Saudi Arabia were lined up against the "radical" republics of Egypt, Syria and Iraq regarding the role of Arab nationalism and political unity (Valbjørn and Bank 2007: 7). However, in the Arab-Israeli conflict, all the Arab states aligned against Israel. Despite inter-Arab rivalries, Arab versus non-Arab disputes have generally taken precedence over the first, although there are some important exceptions to this rule. For example, Syria supported Iran during the 1980-88 war with Iraq, and both Jordan and Syria have attacked the Palestinians despite the shared Arab opposition to Israel (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 190). In other words, the Arab states fear both each other and Iran, at the same time as they are both dependent upon and dislike the United States. Thus, regional security issues are both intricate and crosscutting.

3 Weapons of Mass Destruction

3.1 WMD Treaties

Arms control, meaning rules for limiting arms competition, has traditionally been separated from arms reduction or disarmament. However, today, the term is often used interchangeably with arms regulation, arms limitation and disarmament (Goldblat 1994: 3). An arms control agreement can be defined as "an agreement among sovereign states, freely arrived at in time of peace through a process of formal inter-governmental negotiation; it must provide for both mutual rights and mutual obligations" (Goldblat 1994: 3). Arms control negotiations normally take place

Table 3.1 Important Treaties and Ratification Status among WMD States

State	Treaty			
	NPT	CWC	BTWC	CTBT
Israel	Not signed	Not ratified	Not signed	Not ratified
Iran	Party to the treaty	Party to the treaty	Party to the treaty	Not ratified
Egypt	Party to the treaty	Not signed	Not ratified	Not ratified
Syria	Party to the treaty	Not signed	Not ratified	Not signed

Sources: OPWC website; OPBW website; UN website on disarmament.

among states that are in tense relationship, and are important where inter-state relations are characterised by hostility. However, some degree of optimism regarding negotiation results is necessary. Furthermore, success or lack of success is largely determined by national interests, which some argue, are a function of the different sectors of government (Goldblat 1994: 6). Each state therefore tries to secure the support of its domestic political and military establishments, and also of other governments. There are many possible ways to hold negotiations, for example the exchange of concessions from all sides to achieve convergence of views, and eventually a treaty. The outcome is highly dependent on the character of the political relations among the parties, and also on the international political climate.

The Middle East is one of the most militarised regions in the world, and the states here generally spend a larger portion of their national budgets on their military forces than most states in other regions do (Cordesman 2004: 29). Although many consider disarmament as important for securing regional security and stability, some also perceive it as reducing their potential power and regional influence (Cordesman 2004: 443). This is also illustrated by all 22 Arab states having joined the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), but many of them have not signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), or the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Israel is the only regional state that is not a member of the NPT. As seen in Table 3.1, it is neither a member of the BTWC, nor has it ratified the CWC or the CTBT.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was established in 1968, and has 189 member states, giving it the largest number of adherents of any arms control treaty in the world (UN disarmament website). Only three states, India, Pakistan, Israel, have refused to sign the treaty, while North Korea² announced that they were withdrawing from it in 2003 (Lewis 2004: 4). The treaty seeks to

“prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, to provide assurance through safeguards applied by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that peaceful nuclear activities in

² North Korea’s membership status is currently suspended (ICG Policy Briefing 2006).

non-nuclear weapon states will not be diverted for weapons purposes, and to promote peaceful uses of nuclear energy” (Scheinman 1999: 1).

The agreement does not outlaw nuclear weapons, but it includes a formal obligation to end nuclear arms races and to negotiate in order to achieve future disarmament. The treaty is however imbalanced in its handling of nuclear capabilities: The five recognized nuclear states³ may possess their weapons for an undefined period of time, receive nuclear weapons from other states, and choose the degree of control over their peaceful nuclear activities (Holøien 2006: 8).

The NPT came under pressure following the discovery of Iraq’s nuclear program⁴ and North Korea’s non-compliance, both in the 1990s. The nuclear weapons tests by India and Pakistan in 1998 also put pressure on the NPT. However, the international legitimacy of the treaty increased when Argentina, Brazil and Cuba joined the treaty in 1995, 1998 and 2002, respectively. South Africa’s renunciation of its nuclear program during the 1990s also contributed to this (Lewis 2004: 4). Another important event was Libyan President Muammar Qaddafi’s decision to lay down the pursuit of WMD. Qaddafi stated that “Libya has become an example to be followed”, and has provided the weapons inspectors with unhindered access to all facilities as well as in-depth information on past nuclear activities (Bowen 2006a: 81). This ensured the transparency of Libya’s nuclear sector to external observers. Although the circumstances leading to this renouncement were context-specific, observers speculate the degree to which Libya constitutes a “model” for how to address future proliferators (Bowen 2006a: 81).

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) from 1975 and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) which entered into force in 1998, are global treaties that commit all parties “not to develop, stockpile, or acquire the covered agents; and prohibit the use or preparation of such weapons” (Scheinman 1999: 2). The two treaties are thus international disarmament treaties that ban entire classes of weapons. So far, 155 states have ratified the BTWC, while 16 have signed, but not ratified it (BTWC website). Furthermore, 182 states have ratified the CWC, while six states have signed, but not ratified it. Many of the non-signatory states are located in the Middle East (OPCW website). The NPT and the CWC both have global systems for monitoring and verification, whereas the BTWC is commonly considered to be ineffective, since it has “no verification measures and hence no teeth” (Hammad and Ali 2004: 100; Lewis 2004: 6).

3.2 Possible WMD Programmes

The outline above shows that most of the international community is opposed to the proliferation of WMD. However, for more than 30 years, the Middle East has been of international concern regarding the proliferation of nuclear weapons and, later on, of chemical and biological weapons. The latter are seen as easier to obtain than nuclear weapons. Many of the countries in the region are suspected of developing or procuring WMD programs of different kinds, and in particular

³ The United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China.

⁴ This led to the view that a more intrusive safeguard regime should be established (the Additional Protocol).

Table 3.2 Possible WMD programmes in the Middle East

State	Chemical	Biological	Nuclear	Missile Delivery Systems
Israel	R&D	R&D	Alleged Weapons	Nuclear capable, SRBMs and MRBMs
Iran	Weapons Programme	Weapons Programme	R&D	SRBMs (Scud-B and Scud-C), probable MRBM capability
Egypt	Weapons Programme	R&D	R&D	SRBMs
Syria	Weapons Programme	Weapons Programme	R&D	SRBMs (Scud-B and Scud-C, SS-21)

Sources: Shtauber and Shapir 2006: 180; Perkovich et al. 2005: 184.

Note: SRBM: short-range ballistic missile, MRBM: medium-range ballistic missile.

delivery systems (Scheinman 1999: 10). Because not just the use of nuclear weapons, but also other types of WMD may threaten the existence of entire populations of the smaller states in the region, it is important that chemical and biological weapons are addressed along with nuclear weapons.

Table 3.2 outlines the WMD capabilities, suspected and confirmed, of key states in the region. The outline gives an overview of arms capabilities that may be used by the states politically as a bargaining card in negotiations about disarmament and in the establishment of a WMDFZ. However, precise assessments of a state's capabilities are difficult, because most WMD programmes remain secret and cannot be verified independently.

One of Israel's main goals is to maintain a qualitative edge over its Arab neighbours. This is seen in the Israeli Defence Force's (IDF) relative superiority over the Arab militaries in leadership, training, equipment capabilities, maintenance, and the ability to adapt to new developments, despite being outnumbered by the combined forces of its neighbours in manpower (Cordesman 2004: 151). According to Cordesman (2004: 472), Israel has the capability to produce at least two types of chemical weapons, and is doing extensive research on both chemical and biological weapons. The estimates of numbers and types of nuclear weapons strongly vary, but some have estimated its total stockpile to be up to 100 weapons (Cordesman 2004: 473; Perkovich et al. 2005: 184).

Since the 1960s, Israel's leaders have stated that "Israel will not be the first nation to introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East" (Cohen 2006: 34). Israel's strategic behaviour has therefore deviated from all other nuclear states, because it has never openly acknowledged its nuclear status (Cohen 2006: 34). This policy has been known as Israel's policy of "nuclear opacity". However, in 1998 former prime minister Shimon Peres admitted that Israel had nuclear weapon capabilities, stating that Israel "built a nuclear option not in order to have a Hiroshima, but an Oslo" (CNS 2006). In a 2006 television interview, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made a blunder during a

discussion of Iran's nuclear aspirations. After stating that Israel has never, in contrast to Iran, threatened another state with extermination, Olmert said "Can you say that this is the same level, when they are aspiring to have nuclear weapons, as America, France, Israel, Russia?" (Aftenposten 13th of December 2006). Some interpreted this to mean that Olmert considered Israel to be a nuclear power, but Israeli leaders still refuse to clarify the country's nuclear status.

Even though Egypt and Israel are at peace, they do not rule out the possibility of a future war against each other in their military planning. They do not actively deploy their forces for such a war, but the distrust can be seen in the competition to upgrade their conventional forces. Israel's nuclear monopoly is also a major concern for Egypt. As Cordesman (2004: 136) argues, "this arms race has been further fuelled by massive U.S. military aid and transfers of advanced weapons and technology to both states – aid and transfers that originated out of efforts to give both states an incentive to ensure they kept their peace agreement".

Egypt is officially committed to creating a NWFZ in the Middle East, and seeks to establish an agreement that bans all WMD from the region. Yet President Hosni Mubarak (1981-) has also stated that if necessary, Egypt could acquire nuclear weapons to match Israel. This can probably be understood more as an effort to pressure Israel towards disarmament negotiations than a security threat. Egypt is however operating two nuclear research reactors, both under safeguards of the IAEA. According to Cordesman (2004: 467), Egypt is thought to have an offensive chemical warfare capability, but the extent of this capability is unknown. This is also supported by Shtauber and Shapir (see Table 3.2). Before 1973, the country completed research for the production of nerve and cyanide gas, and allegedly also has production facilities for mustard and nerve gas. Egypt is also thought to be pursuing biological weapons research, but this is based on unconfirmed sources (Cordesman 2004: 467).

Iran is believed to have a chemical weapons programme (Shtauber and Shapir 2006). The country's development of chemical weapons capabilities intensified during the 1980s and the Iran-Iraq war, but reports about Iranian production and research facilities are highly uncertain (Cordesman 2004: 500). In 1999 the country admitted to having possessed chemical weapons in the past (Shtauber and Shapir 2006: 119). As seen in Table 3.1, Iran has ratified the CWC, and is therefore obliged to eliminate its chemical programme. Nevertheless, it continues to upgrade its chemical warfare production infrastructure and munitions arsenal. This effort may therefore suggest that the Iranian leadership intends to maintain a CW capability (Federation of American Scientists Homepage). The country is also suspected of having a biological weapons programme, although this has not been substantiated. Efforts to develop these weapons were documented as early as in 1982 and some believe that Iran began active weapons production in 1996, even though it signed the BTWC in 1973. According to the CIA, "... Iran holds some stocks of biological agents and weapons ... [And] Iran has the technical infrastructure to support a significant biological weapons program ..." (Cordesman 2004: 505). The Federation of American Scientists also states that Iran's biological warfare programme is believed to be in the advanced research and development phase.

Iran is currently alarming the international community as it seeks nuclear energy technology that could be used to create weapon materials. The concern is based on Iran's uncertain intentions and recent history (Chubin 2006). The Shah started a nuclear programme in the 1970s, which was later revitalized by Grand Ayatollah Khomeini in 1984. The status of the programme after the Iran-Iraq war has been controversial, and Iran has previously denied the existence of such a programme. According to Fitzpatrick (2006a: 14), a common opinion among analysts is that Iran could have a nuclear weapon around the year 2010. However, these estimates are for "crash programs", that is, if "Iran decides to go for a bomb as quickly as possible, even with very marginal break-out capability of as little as 1,500 centrifuge machines" (Fitzpatrick 2006a: 15). In any case, a full scale nuclear technology infrastructure, such as is currently being developed in Iran, would turn the country into a so-called "virtual nuclear state" (ElBaradei 2005).

As seen in Table 3.2, Syria is considered to have a chemical weapons programme. This is also supported by Jouejati (2006: 64), who states that Syria has a large and advanced chemical weapon capability that is said to include chemical warheads for Scud ballistic missiles and chemical gravity bombs delivered by aircraft. Its chemical weapons stockpile is believed to include sarin, VX and mustard gas. The knowledge about Syria's biological weapons programme is more limited. According to Shtauber and Shapir (2006), Syria has a biological weapons programme, but others have stated that it is not clear whether Syria has developed such a programme (Hashim 2006: 76).

Shtauber and Shapir (see Table 3.2) consider Syria's nuclear weapons capabilities to be at the stage of R&D. This is also supported by Cordesman (2004: 484), who states that an "ongoing low-level research effort seems likely". According to Pakistan, Syria was approached by the A. Q. Khan network, but nothing came out of the negotiations. Moreover, in an American Congressional hearing in 2006, it was asserted that Khan had sold nuclear technology to Syria (Breivik and Toft 2007: 26). Syria does operate a small Chinese-built nuclear research reactor (IAEA Homepage). However, although Syria has been mentioned as a potential nuclear proliferation risk, there is no evidence in open sources that it has ever had serious nuclear weapons ambitions (SIPRI Homepage 2006).

In addition to these four states, it should also be mentioned that Saudi Arabia might be encouraged to develop WMD capabilities as a response to regional developments. Shtauber and Shapir (2006) argue that Saudi Arabia has no known research activity on nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. However, as Russell (2001: 71) has stated, "... it cannot have escaped Saudi attention that unconventional military capabilities in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf are growing rapidly". Although there has been no striking evidence that Saudi Arabia has made efforts to acquire WMD, circumstantial evidence may suggest that the Saudis are at least leaning toward a nuclear deterrent option. There have also been speculations about an agreement between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan on nuclear cooperation (Breivik and Toft 2007: 26). One may therefore assume that regional developments could lead Saudi Arabia to increase its efforts to build a WMD programme.

3.3 WMD Free Zones

The first nuclear weapon-free zone was established by the Treaty of Tlatelolco in 1967, which prohibits nuclear weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Roman-Morey 2004: 49). It has been followed by treaties in other parts of the world, for example the 1986 Treaty of Rarotonga (South Pacific) and the 1995 Treaty of Bangkok (South-East Asia)⁵. In the Middle East, the establishment of a NWFZ was first proposed as early as in 1974, by Iran and Egypt. The UN General Assembly adopted resolution number 3263 the same year, which today has been accepted by all Arab states, Iran and Israel⁶ (UN website; Cserveny 2004: 83). The resolution has been renewed every year with small changes. The version adopted in 1974 emphasized that “in order to advance the idea of a nuclear-weapon-free zone ... it is indispensable that all parties concerned in the area proclaim solemnly and immediately their intention to refrain, on a reciprocal basis, from producing, testing, obtaining, acquiring or in any other way possessing nuclear weapons” (UN website). It also called upon the parties to accede to the NPT.

In 1990, Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak suggested that a WMDFZ should be established in the Middle East, parallel to the creation of the NWFZ. This proposal was supported by NPT states as well as the IAEA General Conference⁷ (Cserveny 2004: 83). According to Hammad and Ali (2004: 91), Mubarak’s initiative emphasized that “all WMD ... should be prohibited in the Middle East; all states ... should make equal and reciprocal commitments in this regard”, and that “all verification measures and modalities should be established to ascertain full compliance by all states of the region with the full scope of the prohibitions without exception”. The need for a broader focus on WMD was especially influenced by Iraqi use of chemical weapons during the 1980-88 war with Iran and against the Kurdish civilian population in 1988, and also by the tension between Iraq and Israel involving the possible use of WMD (Cohen 1999: 79).

The cornerstone in the establishment of a WMDFZ is the political will and commitment of regional actors to enter into such an agreement in the context of the regional security environment. Scholars have argued that in some cases, it may be preferable that a smaller number of states take the lead in the early phases of creating a WMDFZ. This may then lead to increased discussion and the inclusion of other states (Jones 2005: 6). The main idea is therefore that one has to “start with the willing and hope that the political climate would change so that others would eventually participate ...” (Yaffe 2001: 14). Central actors may be countries that are at peace, such as Israel and Egypt. However, given the large differences of opinion between the two states, other states may be more suited to lead the process. Furthermore, analysts have suggested that the existing NWFZ have been the “easy zones” to establish, located where there are no nuclear weapons and where the incentives to obtain them are low (Holøien 2006: 15). Conversely, all three categories of WMD are most likely present in the Middle East, and the security environment may give rise to increased proliferation. A WMDFZ in the Middle East

⁵ For a description of all nuclear weapon free zones, see Holøien 2006.

⁶ Israel joined in supporting the resolution in 1980, after abstaining from voting during the 1970s (Cohen 1999: 84).

⁷ Since 1991, the IAEA General Conference has annually adopted a resolution by consensus on the application of IAEA Safeguards in the Middle East.

therefore involves two difficult and interrelated issues, that is, to end all Israeli and Arab WMD programs and to freeze the non-WMD status of all states in the region. Although all regional states have agreed to establish a WMDFZ in principle, large differences remain on whether this process should be separated from the broader peace process or not. This is especially a difference between Israel and the rest of the regional states. For Israel, the nuclear option is perceived as essential for its security until a comprehensive peace treaty is signed, while the other states do not necessarily see an automatic link between a WMDFZ and a peace agreement.

In 2004, representatives from the Gulf States took the lead and presented a WMDFZ plan⁸ to their governments, which was initiated by the Gulf Research Centre (Holøien 2006: 24). The initiative includes Iran, and would therefore eliminate the major threat to regional stability posed by Iran's existing and potential WMD programmes. To some extent, explicit opposition to Iran's possible nuclear aspirations has been a taboo in the Arab world, even though many states consider a nuclear Iran to be a potential threat (Landau 2006). However, at a security conference in Doha in 2005, the leader of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) portrayed Iran's possible nuclear aspirations as a direct threat to the Gulf States, breaking the traditional silence of Arab states toward Iran. However, given the current situation, it is highly unlikely that Iran would agree to renounce its nuclear programme. In addition, it would be difficult to establish a WMDFZ without taking into account the impact of the regional states that are external to the negotiations. So, as long as one actor continues to proliferate or continue its WMD program, it provides the other states with political pretexts for further proliferation, which makes cooperation difficult. This indicates the need for an inclusive approach.

Regardless of the many constraints, the Gulf States may play a key role as catalysts for change and place the WMD issue on the regional and international agenda (Jones 2005: 15). As far as is known, none of the Gulf States except Iran have WMD programmes or possible aspirations, thus increasing the possibility of creating lasting agreements between these states. However, the smaller Gulf States, including Kuwait, Oman and Qatar, are vulnerable to threats from their more powerful neighbours, Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. During previous negotiations, "when the Saudis feared a breakthrough in the ACRS [Arms Control and Regional Security] talks was about to be reached in Doha, Qatar, they moved to block further discussions" (Steinberg 2005: 504). Although many of the smaller states have considerable financial capabilities, Saudi Arabia's perceived political and diplomatic dominance over the smaller Gulf States may constrain the Gulf States' role as WMDFZ initiators. The smaller states face the challenge of Saudi Arabia's emphasis on the hierarchical power relationship between the Gulf States, as seen in its disapproval of the smaller Gulf States being vocal in the normalization process with Israel (Steinberg 2005: 504).

In any case, the Gulf States could make important contributions on a more practical level. According to Jones (2005: 15), there is a great need for work on the technical aspects of a future WMDFZ in the Middle East, such as verification issues, security guarantees and definitions of the WMDFZ. Although much has been said about the WMDFZ in terms of general ideas, the regional

⁸ The Gulf Model includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Iraq.

states themselves have put little work into considering what this zone actually implies. Discussions about the differences in views between the states on how to achieve a WMDFZ in the Middle East have also been largely absent.

4 Key States in the Establishment of a WMDFZ

4.1 Egypt

Egypt has been at the core of initiatives to limit WMD since the 1960s. The first initiative emerged after concerns from the Kennedy administration about Israel's nuclear program, Egyptian use of chemical weapons in Yemeni Civil War (1963-67), and Egypt's growing interests in acquiring WMD. The United States organized "quiet talks" between the parties, but little headway was made at the time (Steinberg 2005: 489). This was especially a result of the "Arab Cold War", turning the attention of President Gamal Abdel Nasser to the issue of Arab nationalism and the Palestinian cause. The rhetoric from Cairo also made it difficult for the United States to convince Israel that Egypt could be restrained. At this point, the perceived threat from its neighbours' conventional weapons also convinced Israel that it "needed a credible strategic deterrent, rather than relying on unreliable and unrealistic promises of mutual arms limitations" (Steinberg 2005: 490). The possibility for arms reduction resulting in a WMDFZ was therefore small. However, although tensions between Israel and the Arab neighbours persisted, the Arab states were often more concerned with inter-Arab affairs than with Israel. With Nasser's loss of prestige after the failure of the United Arab Republic with Syria in 1961 and with the military intervention in Yemen, Egypt was especially concerned with retaining the leadership of the "radical" bloc of Arab states. This made it unlikely that Egypt would be able to commit to an arms reduction regime, because of the damage it could do to Egypt's position among its Arab neighbours (Cleveland 2000: 328).

The 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt created diplomatic contacts and improved the relationship between the two countries, but many describe it as a "cold peace" (Ruble 2006: 555). The treaty gave Egypt the benefits of economic and military assistance, but also "diplomatic prominence, intelligence strengthening, [and] technology transfer" (Alterman 2005: 358). President Anwar Sadat also believed that nuclear weapons were no longer necessary or valuable to the country, and was thus willing to give up the nuclear program started by Nasser. Furthermore, starting in the 1970s, there was renewed focus on arms reduction, including Egyptian, Iranian and Israeli support for a nuclear weapons free zone. However, even though Egypt has a formal peace treaty with Israel and has committed itself to promoting a WMDFZ, it often criticizes Israel, and does not discuss the WMD issue unconditionally.

Egypt's position on establishing a WMDFZ can be illustrated by studying previous disarmament negotiation attempts. As previously mentioned, the "Mubarak Initiative" from 1990 called for the establishment of a zone free of WMD, stressing the importance of a global regime and emphasizing the role of international institutions, such as the United Nations. Egypt has continued

to highlight the role of international institutions and rejects bilateral or regional frameworks. According to Steinberg (2005: 501), this position reflects Egypt's strong influence within international institutions, and its national interest in upholding their centrality. Similar positions are held by Syria and Iran. Bilateral and regional frameworks would also entail more contact with Israel, and thus collide with important political and ideological foreign policy dimensions.

There was also an effort by the administration of George H.W. Bush, starting in 1991, which resulted in many formal and informal sessions as well as a multilateral working group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) (Steinberg 2005: 493). However, differences regarding issue linkage and the scope of the sessions made it difficult to agree on a working agenda and establish a declaration of principles. Egypt was a central actor in the Arab bloc, and Egyptian foreign minister Amr Mousa emphasized that Israel's nuclear capability had to be on top of the agenda (Terrill 1999: 116). Egypt also demanded an Israeli agreement linking the NWFZ to the NPT, which Israel rejected. The Arab countries especially criticized the relaxed attitude of the West toward Israeli nuclear activities, in contrast to the strong criticism of Iraq before the 2003 invasion. However, some of the other Arab states indicated an interest in confidence-building measures and were willing to postpone the nuclear issue. This was not welcomed by Egypt, who reasserted its pre-eminence among the Arab states regarding contacts with non-Arab states, including Israel and the West. Although some of the Gulf States ignored this position and pursued increased economic ties with Israel and strengthened their ties with the United States, Egyptian and Saudi opposition led to the failure of these attempts (Steinberg 2005: 495).

The Egyptian stand may therefore have been motivated by a wish to increase its own power position and influence in the region, rather than promoting the common interest of a WMDFZ and increased interaction between Israel and the Arab world. Egypt often views itself as "the natural leader" of the Arab world, and in most security issues, Egypt guards its role as regional leader, and most commonly demands that the other Arab states accept this. This has led to inter-Arab competition and uncompromising positions, especially in relation to Israel. This kind of leadership rivalry may therefore have provided an additional obstacle to regional cooperation.

The conflict over the Chemical Weapons Convention has also constrained the creation of a WMDFZ. Many Arab states have considered chemical weapons as the only available military deterrent to an Israeli nuclear strike (Terrill 1999: 118). Thus, to abolish these weapons while Israel retains its nuclear weapons would be to institutionalize Israeli strategic dominance. Egypt, in contrast to Syria, viewed this discrepancy in power more as influencing diplomatic and political authority, rather than in military and security terms. However, Egypt did not sign the treaty and urged other Arab leaders to adopt the same position. After this conflict, Egypt has been more unwilling to support the ACRS process. The NPT review conference in 1995 also proved to be an important obstacle. Egypt maintained that the NPT could not "be extended indefinitely with all of its "loopholes" and "shortcomings" intact" (Terrill 1999: 120). It seems clear that Egypt wanted the criticism of Israeli non-membership to lead to concessions, and to encourage other countries, including the United States to put pressure on Israel to make compromises. Eventually, the NPT was extended indefinitely in 1995, despite intensive Egyptian lobbying. Although Egypt

never expected to win the struggle, the diplomatic defeat was humiliating. Nevertheless, Egypt still plays a leading role in activities concerning the NPT.

Domestic political concerns in Egypt have also made the establishment of a WMDFZ difficult. Arab politics is often portrayed as being dominated by authoritarian regimes that use force and repression as tools to secure domestic political control. The region's so-called liberal autocracies, however, mix authoritarianism with some degree of pluralism. These regimes are "liberal in the sense that they tolerate and promote some openness in civil society, in the press, and even in the electoral system ...", but autocratic as the rulers always retain the upper hand, controlling the security establishment, dominate the media and deliver economic rewards to their clients (Brumberg 2003: 3). In the Arab world, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen are considered liberal autocracies. Here, the rulers often apply a strategy of divide-and-rule, playing groups against each other, making it possible to build different alliances both inside and outside the regime. Leadership is to a large degree characterized by personal rule, and political interactions are marked by clientelist networks binding actors to the regime structure. Although the president is given almost unlimited power by the constitution, the military has played, and continues to play, an important role in Egyptian politics (Cordesman 2004). The ruling elite is made up of security, business and political alliances, and the president sustains a delicate juggling act to secure regime survival.

As in many Arab states, the Egyptian military is a key political and economic actor in the regime. Since the 1970s, military officers have to a large degree withdrawn from daily governance, and there has been a gradual decline in the number of officers involved in politics. However, the military holds an influential position in the political system through its close association with the president (Carnegie Resource Page 2005). The large scale of the military's economic activity also makes it a powerful source of patronage for the regime (Alterman 2000: 114). However, Mubarak has substantial leverage over the armed forces, especially in the distribution of the annual 1.3 billion dollars in military aid from the United States. This provides an important source of patronage that ties clients to the regime, and may help to secure conformity on controversial issues. Yet in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world, many state institutions, particularly the military establishment, continue to see their relations with Israel in competitive terms (Karawan 1999: 74). Ordinary people and elites view Israel's nuclear capability as threatening, and they continue to push for a confrontational line against Israel's nuclear monopoly, which reduces regime willingness and ability to cooperate.

A central goal of Mubarak's foreign policy has been to secure Egypt's traditional leadership of the Arab world. The perception of Egypt as a regional leader also boosts Mubarak's standing among the Egyptian people. Furthermore, the general public disapproves of Israel not being pressured as much as the Arab states on the WMD issue. The emphasis on Israel's nuclear capability during the ACRS talks may therefore have been influenced by a desire to appeal to different domestic fractions supporting this stand to score domestic political points. By emphasizing this issue, the government is also able to avoid criticism in other policy areas (Steinberg 2005: 495). The government knows that most ordinary Egyptians do not approve of

Israel having nuclear weapons, and that Israel is unpopular within large segments of society. A policy without demands would therefore reduce the standing of the regime. Within the government, the foreign minister managed to increase his regional and domestic standing by leading the campaign against Israel's NPT policy. This made it difficult for others, including President Mubarak, to address the issue in a more conciliatory language. This led to a tougher and more radical stand on regional arms issues, and thus also contributed to the failure of the ACRS process. Hence, although a policy more favourable to Israel might provide the country with more foreign aid, it could antagonize large parts of the Egyptian public opposed to "selling out" to Israel and the West.

Analysts have also been concerned about whether oppositional groups would uphold existing treaties that the government has signed in case there would be alternation of power. Egypt's main Islamist oppositional movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, but also secular oppositional groups, have been ambiguous regarding the possibility of cancelling the peace treaty with Israel. An important question is whether a government controlled or heavily influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood would acknowledge the peace treaty with Israel, and by this recognizing the Jewish state and maintaining diplomatic relations with it (Hamzawy, Ottaway and Brown 2007: 8). This rhetoric especially escalated during the 2006 Lebanon War, when "the Brothers demanded a rethinking of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and an immediate suspension of all contacts with Israel" (Hamzawy and Bishara 2006: 6).

4.2 Iran

The scenario of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons could seriously weaken the NPT and reduce the possibility of establishing a WMDFFZ in the Middle East. Iran's interest in developing nuclear weapons should however be understood in a broader context of historical and regional developments, rather than only as a result of the ideological preferences of the current regime.

The unstable regional environment has provided the country with strong incentives for acquiring nuclear weapons. Perceptions of living in a dangerous neighbourhood with four nuclear-armed countries in near proximity (Russia, Pakistan, India, and Israel), and no true ally among its neighbours have made an impact on Iran's strategic calculations. Furthermore, although Pakistan's relationship with Iran has improved since the weakening of the relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban after the 11th of September 2001, Iran is concerned about the political instability of the Pakistani regime (Takeyh 2006b: 145). Iran's rulers especially perceive the possibility of a radical Sunni regime with nuclear capabilities taking over power as a large potential threat.

Israel is also portrayed as an existential threat, both to Iran and the Islamic world in general. This can however be understood more as a rhetorical tool used by the regime to mobilize domestic and regional opinion. Israel is therefore perhaps more an ideological threat than a military one, and therefore not the primary factor behind Iran's possible quest for nuclear weapons. However, this calculation could change with potential actions taken by Israel or other actors in response to Iran's WMD programme.

Events in the Gulf area are one of Iran's major strategic concerns. Although the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 removed a major existential threat, this also led to the strategic problem of American presence. The threat from Iraq and the current American presence are probably the most significant challenges dominating Iran's threat perceptions (Takeyh 2006a: 52). Iran especially perceives the United States' policy as uncompromising and confrontational. Signals from Washington about regime change have also strengthened Iran's views on the need for a deterrent and a negotiating position to contain U.S. pressure (Gheissari and Nasr 2005: 187). Massive American power projection and the continued antagonism between Washington and Tehran are perhaps the most important threats to Iran, and can be seen as Iran's "primary motivation for the acquisition of the "strategic weapon" " (Takeyh 2006a: 54). The naming of Iran as part of the "Axis of Evil" by the United States also raised Iranian fears of being the next target after Iraq, and may thus have strengthened the perceived need for increased security and deterrence (Normark et al. 2005: 28).

A low degree of trust in the international community and international law may also inhibit Iranian cooperation on a WMD. As former president Ali Akbar Rafsanjani stated, "although the use of such weapons [WMD] is inhuman, the [Iran-Iraq] war taught us that international laws are only scraps of paper" (ICG Middle East Report 2003: 13). If Iran acquires nuclear weapons, this could create a security dilemma, making more states in the region develop nuclear weapons. However, Israel's nuclear capabilities have so far not resulted in nuclear proliferation among its neighbours. Nevertheless, a nuclear Iran would increase possibility for a regional nuclear arms race, and Iran also might share nuclear-weapons technology with other states, for example Syria (Fitzpatrick 2006: 21). Observers have mentioned the possibility of Saudi Arabia joining the nuclear club if Iran was to obtain nuclear weapons. The enmity between Iran and Saudi Arabia is by some seen as based on the Sunni-Shi'a divide, while other emphasize the competition for political dominance in the Gulf. However, in order to obtain nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia would have to defy its main patron, the United States, or persuade the United States to give it to them, which is probably unlikely to happen. A covert program would also be difficult to establish, given the large American military presence in the region and the bases it maintains in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait (Kadhim 2006: 587).

The nuclear issue is also influenced by a power struggle within the country. Iran is governed by complex institutions and competing power centres⁹ that inherently favour continuity over change (ICG Middle East Briefing 2005: 1). Although hopes for reform increased with the election of President Mohammed Khatami in 1997, the institutional features of the political system must be kept in mind (Bakhash 2003: 109). Contrary to the Arab heads of state, the Iranian president does not hold the highest office. Instead, it is the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the ultimate power, being "commander in chief of all armed forces, with the ability to declare war, mobilize troops and appoint and dismiss the head of the judiciary, the head of state radio and television, the supreme commander of the Revolutionary Guards, the supreme commander of the

⁹ This includes the Supreme Leader, the President, the Council of Guardians, the Expediency Council, the Parliament, security forces and parastatal forces.

regular military and the security services and clerical jurists in the Council of Guardians” (ICG Report 2002: 4). Decisions therefore ultimately rest with the Supreme Leader and other unelected officials. With the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, the supreme leadership, the presidency and the parliament all came under conservative control for the first time in years, removing some checks and further consolidating Supreme Leader Khamenei’s power (ICG Middle East Briefing 2005: 7).

The International Crisis Group (ICG) (2003: 15) argues that there is evidence of an internal debate concerning the nuclear issue and Iran’s attitude toward the international community. This means that there may be constituencies for creating a WMDFZ in Iran today, even though much focus has been on the need to develop nuclear weapons capabilities. The primary supporters of the nuclear option are the so-called hard-line elements associated with the Supreme Leader. This trend has however been strengthened by the increased influence of war veterans like President Ahmadinejad. According to the President, the international community acted with indifference toward Saddam Hussein’s war crimes against Iran during the 1980s, leading to the belief that Iran “cannot be predicated on global opinion and treaties” (Takeyh 2006b: 149). The value of trading WMD for enhanced security thus has no value to the hard-liners. Conversely, the more pragmatic elements within Iran, also including officials within the ministries and the security establishment, argue that the integration of Iran into the international community requires the acceptance of restrictions on the nuclear program. The proponents of this strategy do not necessarily call for the dismantling of the nuclear program, but for the development of a nuclear capability within the guidelines of the NPT. Finally, more moderate factions see the programme as damaging to the other aspects of Iran’s foreign policy. This group has a more conciliatory approach, and could possibly favour a suspension of the program. As Iran’s former IAEA representative, Ali Akbar Salehi stated, “we cannot buy security by having nuclear weapons which only invite more threats against ourselves” (Takeyh 2006b: 152).

Nationalist motivations, however, could hamper a WMDFZ, because “although only a hard-line fringe in Iran publicly advocates actually producing nuclear weapons, the elites share a consensus that the Islamic republic should have at least a latent nuclear weapons capability” (Fitzpatrick 2006b: 530-531). The main motivations behind this view are, for example, to increase prestige, assert national pride and sovereignty, and to secure what they perceive as Iran’s natural dominance in the region (Fitzpatrick 2006b: 531). Furthermore, when the international opposition to the enrichment programme is portrayed as denying Iran its rights, it enhances internal cohesion. Gheissari and Nasr (2005: 186) also argue that the acquirement of nuclear energy is widely supported by the ruling elite, but for different reasons. There also exists a strong sentiment among the population that if not nuclear weapons, Iran has the right to at least develop nuclear technology. The problem is, however, that although the spread of peaceful nuclear technology is legitimate according to NPT rules, it may bring states close to a weapons capability (Chubin 2006: 5). Many also see developing nuclear weapons as a matter of prestige, increasing Iran’s status among regional actors. Having a nuclear capability is by some seen as a tool to secure the survival of the Islamic regime, protecting it against outside threats and internal opposition (Fitzpatrick 2006b: 531). Furthermore, a nuclear bomb would enhance the prestige of the regime

that developed it, and thus strengthen its rule and impede the struggle for democracy and human rights (Fitzpatrick 2006a: 22). For Supreme Leader Khamenei, the nuclear issue can therefore be seen as a litmus test of the value of his office and leadership. The nuclear issue is one of the few issues where the ruling elite is representative of the popular will, and is thus an important tool in rallying support for the regime.

4.3 Israel

As previously mentioned, there are large differences between the Israeli approach to a WMD and the other regional states, based on differences in interests, approaches and priorities regarding arms control and WMD issues (Said 2004: 129). For example, in 1996, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that “lasting peace” means peace between democracies, and that Israel must maintain its strategic deterrence until democracy prevails in the region. Former Prime Minister Ehud Barak has also said that Israel should maintain the nuclear option indefinitely (Said 2004: 129).

Israel’s position on disarmament is contradictory: it continues to oppose WMD through official statements, but it has not ratified any of the WMD treaties or shown transparency about its own capabilities (Othman and Abdulrahim 2004: 113). Israeli incentives for developing WMD were strong already from the state’s formation. The most central aspects then were the combination of being a small country with limited resources, and that Israel had no close allies in a region where most states denied its right to exist (Normark et al. 2005: 41). Israel is also vulnerable because the population is largely concentrated in a few centres (Scheinman 1999: 12). Thus, a WMD capability has been indispensable in order to support the limited arsenal of conventional arms and troops. The undeclared nuclear option therefore plays an important part in Israel’s military doctrine, together with the goal of preventing any other regional state from obtaining unconventional weapons capability. In 1981, Israel launched a preventive attack against Osiraq, Iraq’s nuclear facility, to counter the development of a nuclear weapons capability. The nuclear reactor was destroyed before it became operational.

The threat from Arab WMD decreased during the early 1990s, and Syria is probably the only actor in the region today with a militarily significant chemical weapons arsenal. Yet, this Syrian capability should not necessarily be perceived as an existential threat to Israel, unless the arsenal is coordinated with the military capabilities of other neighbouring states (Normark et al. 2005: 21). Conversely, the development of a nuclear programme in Iran poses a new emerging existential threat to Israel. Iran is probably the country in the region that is the most hostile to Israel, both ideologically and politically. It does not recognize Israel’s right to exist, and has used highly hostile rhetoric to show this rejection. Meir Dagan, director of the external intelligence agency in Israel, the Mossad, told a parliamentary committee in 2003 that Iran posed an “existential threat” to Israel (The CS Monitor 2003). An Iran in possible pursuit of nuclear weapons, combined with its advanced missile capabilities, is perceived as an existential security threat and the conflict therefore risks becoming an armed conflict, if Israel was to attack Iran as it did with Iraq in 1981. (Cohen 2006: 45).

Efforts to create a WMD-free zone in the Middle East have especially drawn attention to Israel's nuclear arsenal. The Egyptian and Syrian position is that the Israeli nuclear arsenal constitutes an important part of the regional security dilemma, and that any efforts towards creation of a security arrangement must include this issue. However, the efforts by the Arab states to bring Israel's WMD programmes onto the international agenda have not resulted in any concessions. Israel's nuclear capabilities have also been on the agenda of the United Nations and the IAEA. For example, the IAEA issued a resolution in 2006 calling upon the concerned countries to take "the practical and appropriate steps required for the implementation of the proposal to establish a mutually and effectively verifiable NWFZ in the region", as well as inviting them to

"adhere to international non-proliferation regimes, including the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, as a means of complementing participation in a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and of strengthening peace and security in the region" (IAEA 2006).

Israel is distrustful of the United Nations, especially because it considers the attitudes of the world community to be hostile towards Israel. Moreover, UN resolutions are not an important guidance in Israeli foreign and security policy, which commonly place strategic interests and national security before international reputation (Drake 2002: 202).

So far, however, Israel's nuclear policy has been successful, because it has enabled it to maintain a regional nuclear monopoly, while at the same time avoiding the political costs associated with openly possessing nuclear weapons (CNS 2006). Hence, creating incentives for Israel to dispose of its WMD is a difficult task. On the other hand, states in the region view Israel's nuclear capability as a strategic fact and not as an analytic possibility, which makes the current Israeli position neither constructive nor ambiguous (Karawan 1999: 68). Instead of achieving stabilization, the more likely result is more destabilization, and an increased desire among other states to acquire nuclear capabilities and more chemical and biological weapons. Furthermore, according to Normark et al. (2005: 43), "the United States and the United Kingdom have presented a united front in defending the Israeli position and have announced that other states in the region must take the first steps towards disarmament, implying that Israel's possession of WMD is legitimized by its precarious security situation". Without pressure from Israel's most important allies, the likelihood of creating successful disarmament efforts is small.

Because many of Israel's regional neighbours have questioned the legitimacy of its existence since the creation of the state, foreign policy and military power plays a crucial role in Israeli domestic politics (Drake 2002: 191). Although certain elements of Israeli strategic thinking have remained stable for long periods of time, competing political agendas and contrasting visions of Israel's regional position exist within the political establishment. Support for a NWFZ has especially been strong in the Labour bloc, while several influential Likud ministers and coalition partners have been "well-known for opposing a NWFZ or any multilateral agreement that might encroach on Israeli nuclear prerogatives even minimally" (Solingen 2001: 388).

There is substantial support among the Israeli public and elite for the policy of nuclear ambiguity (CNS 2006). According to Said (2004: 127), nearly all Israelis consider the nuclear option to be crucial for national security, a thought that will not necessarily be weakened by a future peace treaty. Many Israelis also consider the low-profile nuclear deterrent strategy to have played a valuable role both in making peace with Egypt and deterring regional war (Cohen 2006: 39). Although such views may be strong in Israeli popular opinion, opinion surveys on other occasions have shown that 72 % of Israelis wanted the country to sign the NPT and agreed that all states in the region should prohibit WMD (Solingen 2001: 390). This suggests that, given a suitable security environment, a WMDFZ could gain popular ratification.

4.4 Syria

Syria has previously stated that it is willing to sign a treaty that will eliminate all WMD from the Middle East. In 2003, Syria also proposed the creation of a WMDFZ and asked the UN Security Council for assistance (ABC News). However, Syrian President Bashar al-Asad has also stated that “unless this [WMDFZ] applies to all countries, we are wasting our time” (Hashim 2006: 74). Furthermore, the WMDFZ initiative may have been an attempt to draw attention away from accusations about its chemical weapons programme, and instead increase the focus on Israel’s alleged nuclear weapons (Normark et al. 2004: 24).

Chemical weapons and missile capabilities have been major pillars of Syria’s security policy, which is driven by the country’s past conventional military defeats against Israel. Jouejati (2006: 63) argues that Syria does not seek status or aggrandizement with the WMD programme, but that it is a result of the country’s threat perceptions. In other words, the primary function of the chemical weapons programme is to deter Israel from engaging in military action against the country. This deterrent motivation is also illustrated by Syria not having articulated any doctrine for the use of such weapons (Scheinman 1999: 6).

Syria also feels threatened by the American dominance in the region, and because parts of its territory, the Golan Heights, is occupied by America’s closest ally in the region, Israel. WMD are therefore perceived to be important for preserving national security. This view was strengthened after Egypt signed the peace treaty with Israel in 1979 when Syria became the last Arab power to continue to confront Israel militarily. The two states have not yet been able to achieve peace. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Syria has been unable to upgrade its weapon systems, because unlike the former Soviet regime, Russia today demands payment before giving Syria the spare parts it needs (Normark et al. 2004: 21). Since conventional forces are expensive to buy and maintain, Syria has embarked on developing chemical weapons as a possible means of achieving some form of strategic parity and deterrence. Chemical weapons are therefore seen as a way of achieving deterrence, given the Israeli conventional military superiority (Zisser 2004). Syria has however tried to draw attention away from its non-conventional capabilities and denies all accusations of having this capability.

The Golan Heights were occupied by Israel after the 1967 war, and annexed in 1981. Syria wants Israel to withdraw to the boundary line from 4th of June 1967, while Israel favours the 1923

colonial boundary, used to define British and French areas of control (Drake 2002: 210; Slater 2002: 84). The boundary issue is of special importance, because the 1967 boundary would give Syria access to the eastern side of Lake Tiberias, which is important to the Israeli water supply. Israel also maintains a military post on the Golan Heights, and from the Heights one gets a good view over Israeli territory. The Golan Heights therefore has strategic importance for Israel, but also for Syria, since the area is only 60 km from the country's capital, Damascus (Slater 2002: 96). In 2000, after years of peace settlement negotiations between Israel and Syria, the talks broke down, when Prime Minister Ehud Barak withdrew unilaterally. With the outbreak of the second Palestinian *intifada* the same year, there was little room for making concessions on any side, and a formal peace agreement between the two countries has yet to materialize. Syria has therefore most likely not given up its WMD programme.

Moreover, Syria shares a long border and traditionally has tense relations with Turkey, a NATO member and an ally of the United States, as well as with Iraq, where the U.S. has had a large military presence since 2003. Although the relationship with Jordan has improved over the last years, it is potentially unstable and tense. In addition to this regional security dimension, domestic opinion also makes it difficult for Syria to renounce its WMD. If this were to occur under U.S. pressure and without Israel giving back the Golan Heights, it would seriously undermine the legitimacy of the Syrian regime. At the same time, talks between Israel and Syria are highly dependent on the American will to mediate.

After the 11th of September 2001, the struggle against terrorism and the proliferation of WMD became central in American foreign policy. Following American accusations of Syrian involvement in sponsoring terrorism and a Syrian chemical weapons programme, Syria became subject to strong political pressure and economic sanctions. With the "war on terror", the United States also stated that it would not make any distinction between terrorists and the states harbouring them (Normark et al. 2004: 23; 42). Even though President Assad made some attempt to approach the United States by sharing information about al-Qaeda, the relationship between the two countries became especially strained in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraqi war. Upholding the WMD programme has therefore become an increased political and economic burden for Syria. On the other hand, given the present regional security environment, the strategic benefits from the WMD programme may still outweigh the costs of possible sanctions. Syria is keenly aware of the symbolic and military importance of balancing Israeli power, as well as the risk of giving in without accomplishing the goal of getting the Golan Heights back. However, a recovery of the Golan Heights and normalisation of relations with the U.S. and Israel would "promote Syria's strategic interests, boost its economy, further broaden support for the government, make possible domestic reform and contribute to longer-term stability" (ICG Middle East Report 2004: 23). This could also bring Syria to the negotiation table more fully committed to a WMDFZ. However, as long as Israel remains a nuclear power, it is unlikely that Syria will dismantle its WMD programme.

5 Prospects for Creating a WMDFZ

5.1 Peace Negotiations and a WMDFZ as Parallel Processes

Although all states agree rhetorically or literally that a WMDFZ is beneficial and would lead to a more secure region, there is great disagreement on how to accomplish this goal, and national security perceptions are still highly affected by the security dilemma. Is it possible to identify convergence of interests on some issues? For example, in the 1970s, there was a change in Egypt's security policy in the wake of previous military defeats against Israel and after increased domestic political insecurity, resulting in a peace agreement with Israel. Both countries thus came to the conclusion that previous wars had not increased their security. This example illustrates that the motivations behind a security policy are not necessarily constant, and can thus be changed. However, strategic cultures, highly affected by zero-sum perceptions of power and the importance of military capabilities, inhibit cooperation.

An important question for the states to discuss is whether the establishment of a WMDFZ *builds* regional confidence and security, or if it *follows* from the establishment of peaceful relations, confidence and security. It is unlikely that the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East would occur in the absence of a process of comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace settlement. Yet this does not mean that the only alternative is to leave the issue of a WMDFZ "untouched until the establishment of a lasting peace in the Middle East" (Cohen 1999: 95). Some observers have noted not only the need for a parallel process that addresses both peace and security issues, but also that progress in one area is not necessarily dependent on progress in other areas. A WMDFZ could improve the possibility of establishing peaceful relations, because it reduces the destructive capabilities of the states and signals trust and conciliation. Furthermore, some hold the view that states can be drawn into or educated into more cooperative relations, by expanding inter-state communication and confidence-building measures. Over time, this may have a synergy effect so that states develop political consensus on security issues (Morgan 2003: 54). However, this is not a likely scenario in the Middle East unless some sense of commitment and willingness to adjust national positions is established, so that there is some overlap of interests. Yet to exclusively base the establishment of a WMDFZ on the achievement of a comprehensive regional peace treaty, would postpone the issue indefinitely. In the meantime, states may increase their weapon capabilities, making it even more difficult to establish a WMDFZ.

5.2 Ways of Renouncing WMD

The challenge of creating a WMDFZ lies in developing an environment in which several states simultaneously are willing to renounce WMD capabilities that they have acquired for very different reasons. Although the reasons behind acquiring WMD programmes are unique to each country, scholars have pointed to three factors that may explain why a state chooses to renounce this capability (Jones 2005: 9). First, a state may realize that security may be better achieved by other means, because the security requirements have changed so much that the threats leading a state to obtain WMD no longer apply. Second, domestic changes may occur that replace the ruling elite that sought WMD, or convince them that WMD are no longer useful. Third, new

norms or initiatives may emerge that reduce the appeal of WMD (Jones 2005: 9-10). In order to create a WMDFZ, it is also necessary to develop some sense of common security interests, so that eliminating the WMD turns into a potential gain that outweighs holding on to the WMD.

In 2003, Libya surprised many observers by announcing that it was giving up its WMD programme. This case shows that WMD can be eliminated in a major country in the Middle East without wide-ranging, regional disarmament steps being in place. The pursuit of these weapons has been driven by a perceived need for deterrence, but also, as seen in Chapter 4, by ambitions of increased influence and prestige both within the Arab world and internationally (Bowen 2006b: 147). Analysts have generally explained the Libyan policy change by focusing on that country's economic problems and American sanctions. It may therefore have been the third of the factors mentioned above (initiatives diminishing the value of WMD) that influenced a change in the second factor, that is, among the ruling elite. What is remarkable is that Libya completed the dismantling process before the United States made promises of reciprocal favours. As Litwak (2006: 178) states, President Muammar Qaddafi "concluded that the utility of relinquishing Libya's WMD capabilities was greater than the benefits of other possible proliferation motivations, such as prestige or the need for a deterrent". The Libyan case demonstrated that by applying a combination of "targeted sanctions, political and diplomatic isolation, export controls and intelligence sharing on nuclear-related shipments and activities", the international community can increase the costs of acquiring WMD, in economic and political terms, and in the right context promote a unilateral decision to give up the pursuit of such weapons (Bowen 2006a: 82). The sudden change of policy therefore represents an opportunity to examine how Libya's change of mind may help in dealing with Iran's nuclear programme, Syrian WMD capabilities, and the WMDFZ in general.

The security policies and arms programmes of the states examined in this report are considered to be the greatest obstacles to creating a WMDFZ in the Middle East. For Egypt and Iran, the WMD issue has a strong domestic dimension, and is also dependent on the need to secure or increase their regional standing. In Egypt, however, the issue of political opposition to Israel and the political and diplomatic costs of giving concessions are probably more crucial than the strategic importance of the WMD capability. For Israel and Syria, WMD are more connected with national security, and the aim of increasing internal or external prestige is therefore not that important. Israel's assumed nuclear weapons are an important obstacle to creating a WMDFZ, and it is not likely that Israel would immediately give up its own arsenal if the other states were to disarm. However, there are also few reasons to believe that the other states would completely give up their own WMD programmes if Israel was to comply (Perkovich et al. 2005: 179). Given the close ties between the United States and Israel, but also between the United States and Egypt, the former has leverage to pressure the two latter countries on the issue, but this is not likely to happen. Egypt and Israel have important strategic value to the United States, and pressuring Israel has potential political costs domestically. For Egypt, a change in the perceptions of the ruling elite is most likely to come when Egypt will not lose any standing domestically or regionally for "giving in" to Israel. This may be dependent on the willingness of Israel to make concessions.

As previously mentioned, Iran's nuclear ambitions have great symbolic value. Obtaining nuclear weapons would be politically defiant, a sign of technological success and provide deterrence against potential political adversaries. For Iran, security guarantees from the United States and other major powers may be important in order to change the state's motivations and commit to a WMDFZ. However, security guarantees from outside powers may be difficult to establish in the region in general, because of the tense relationship between the United States and many of the Middle Eastern states. Another approach is to encourage change in terms of influencing the political debate within Iran. As argued in Chapter 4, there are several positions on the nuclear issue within Iran's political elite, and substantial efforts should therefore be put into strengthening the view that WMD are not the answer to their long-term security questions. Iran has had nuclear ambitions since the 1970s, which makes the issue quite established and maybe difficult to influence. However, international pressure could have a positive effect by strengthening the faction that does not want to be treated as an international pariah (Friend 2006: 190).

It is difficult to picture Syria duplicating Libya and unilaterally eliminating its WMD without any promise of gains. It is equally hard to envisage Israel dismantling its arsenal in the absence of a profound regional transformation involving not only Syria, but other countries such as Iran and even Egypt. However, Syria faces a regime of sanctions just as Libya did, and the country is also vulnerable to pressure from the EU, which is an important trade partner. Furthermore, in contrast to Iran, Syria can be considered a fully authoritarian state. This calls for a different approach, because there is no room for civil society to moderate the regime's behaviour (Friend 2006: 194). For Syria, engaging in talks resulting in a detailed resolution could, however, provide a "political cover for Syria to act, not under U.S. pressure but in conformity with UN will, and to agree to internationally-verified steps to dismantle its WMD programs" (ICG Middle East Report 2004: 23). Syria is especially important, because it is only within the context of a peace agreement with Syria that Israel might agree to consider adding a nuclear component to the peace treaty (Cohen 1999: 98). According to Friend (2006: 193), many of the "sticks" to pressure Syria to renounce its WMD are already in place, while the "carrots" are missing. A clearer message of what Syria will receive in return for joining the WMDFZ could increase the likelihood of achieving disarmament. As previously mentioned, the Syrian case is complicated by Israeli capabilities and the Golan Heights. In the case of Libya, the claim of WMD as a necessary deterrent was not highly credible. In the case of Syria, the deterrence argument is more plausible, and this in turn raises the political costs of giving up its WMD (Friend 2006: 194). Solving the Iran issue and defusing the enmity between Israel and Syria, however, would eliminate two of the most important obstacles to a WMDFZ.

5.3 The Role of Confidence-Building Measures

In order to encourage a process of creating a WMDFZ beyond mere rhetoric, considerable effort is needed to develop a regional security and cooperation structure. In this regard, confidence-building measures (CBM) can play an important role, especially in the absence of binding agreements and trust between states. Confidence-building measures are considered to be actions that "provide credibility to states' affirmations of their peaceful intentions" (Goldblat 1994: 4). This includes measures to reassure states of the non-aggressive intentions of adversaries,

narrowing the scope of political threats by stronger states, and reducing the likelihood of unintended escalation of hostile acts (Goldblat 1994: 4). Confidence-building measures do not necessarily affect the strength of a state's armed forces directly, but they reduce the likelihood of using force to settle disputes, and are an important step in facilitating disarmament. In order to have the intended effect, the measures require a spill-over process "in which the transformation to a positive-sum or "win-win" situation is recognized" (Steinberg 2005: 501).

According to Othman and Abdulrahim (2004: 111), one of the most important confidence-building measures related to a WMDFZ in the Middle East is the implementation of the NPT conditions that specify the safeguards of nuclear facilities. However, this suggestion is controversial, because it is at the core of the disagreement between Israel and the Arab states. This proposal, which is similar to the one made by the Arab states, would imply that Israel should give up all its nuclear weapons before any agreement has been reached containing guarantees from the other states, which seems highly unrealistic. More realistic confidence-building measures are agreements to prevent attacks on WMD facilities, increasing the transparency of military affairs, and working to establish an effective verification system. In order to ensure that all actors are confident on the commitment of the other states, it is also important to develop measures to verify compliance and sanction capabilities to settle non-compliance. An agreement on even the smallest set of CBM would signal commitment to the establishment of a WMDFZ and increase the will to make compromises (Stein 2003: 15).

Another more informal strategy is to increase the contact between scholars, NGOs and politicians, in order to influence the strategic thinking on issues of security and possible frameworks for new security regimes (Yaffe 2001: 22). After the end of the multilateral working group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) in 1995, non-governmental organizations and other actors initiated workshops, seminars and courses as part of the so-called "Track Two diplomacy" to engage Arabs and Israelis in dialogues about peace negotiations and regional security. The purpose is to bring together elites from different countries to exchange ideas and establish personal relationships. The Track Two activities are likely to be central until the regional states are able to engage in formal "Track One" negotiations (Yaffe 2001: 10). These activities are especially important, because they keep the parties engaged in discussions, even in the absence of a formal negotiation process (Yaffe 2001: 16-17). These interaction processes do not have the aim or official mandate to result in binding or non-binding agreements, and officials who participate do so "in their private capacities" (Yaffe 2001: 16). This, however, gives the participants an opportunity to discuss issues directly with their counterparts without making official commitments, and without not necessarily being part of a governmental delegation. This type of contact may also constitute a foundation for resuming official talks. However, even though these informal activities are important, they should not be seen as an alternative to official negotiations, because they cannot produce binding confidence-building agreements or arms control agreements (Yaffe 2001: 10).

5.4 The Inclusion of Relevant Actors

An important issue is the inclusion of relevant actors in the negotiations. In the past, states that

are hostile to Israel, such as Syria and Iran, have not been included. In the previously mentioned multilateral working group on ACRS established in 1991, 14 regional states were included, among them Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. The working group provided a unique setting for communication between the actors. However, some of the most central actors at the time were not involved in the ACRS. Iran, Iraq and Libya were not invited, while Syria and Lebanon decided not to participate in the multilateral sessions until they saw progress in the bilateral talks with Israel (Yaffe 2001: 14). Without these actors at the negotiating table, the possibility of confidence building, improved communication and increased possibilities for an agreement between Israel and the most adverse states are largely absent.

External actors may play both a negative and a positive role in the process of establishing a WMDFZ. First, proliferation of WMD by external actors, such as states in neighbouring regions, can lead to increased proliferation pressure in the Middle East. As previously mentioned, Pakistan's nuclear status has influenced the threat perceptions of regional actors. Furthermore, external actors may be willing to offer "know-how", technology and hardware to regional states, which could further undermine the establishment of the WMDFZ (Baumgart and Müller 2004-05: 55). It is therefore important to involve major powers and external actors to limit the spread of illegal WMD technology to regional states. For example, Russia can play a significant role, because it has strong political and economic interests with Iran, which is one of the major recipients of Russian peaceful nuclear technology and arms sales (Arbatov 2006). External actors can also encourage the establishment of a WMDFZ by providing economic and technological incentives for states that join and maintain the zone. For example, the United States has played a substantial role in sustaining the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel by providing Egypt with economic and military aid. However, the impact of this role is dependent on the external actor's standing as reliable and impartial. External actors, such as the UN Security Council or specific states, may also provide important assistance as mediators in compliance disputes and as enforcers of the zone (Baumgart and Müller 2004-05: 55). However, to secure the legitimacy of the agreements, this role requires a high degree of trust by the regional states in the impartiality of the external actors. Major changes are therefore required in the relationship between Iran and the United States, as well as efforts to improve the reputation of the United States among the Arab populations.

5.5 Strong Domestic Coalitions

An important question is what kind of changes that are needed in order to move closer to the goal of establishing a WMDFZ. Fawcett (2005: 190) argues that "the state remains the essential ingredient in determining what makes for successful ... cooperation in the long term". Although external pressure may be important in the initiation process, it may not be sufficient enough to sustain the cooperation arrangements. Establishing a WMDFZ is therefore a question of state capacity and regime type. Middle Eastern states have traditionally not only lacked the capability, but also the determination to make cooperation work, and the current domestic arrangements inhibit, rather than promote meaningful cooperation. The state has little legitimacy, because it is unaccountable to its own citizens, and because national identity and loyalties of the people may lie within other frames of reference. As Buzan and Wæver (2003: 197) have argued, "... the

insecurity of most regimes in the Middle East spills over into regional security politics". One example is the importance of resistance towards Israel for the domestic legitimacy of many Middle Eastern regimes.

Furthermore, some have argued that a democratic political system may be a "sufficient, if not a necessary ingredient in this process" of achieving successful regional cooperation (Fawcett 2005: 191). The main thought is that authoritarian regimes cannot build regional security arrangements, because their treatment of their own citizens is reflected in their perceptions of regional relations. According to this argument, "states that deny their citizens basic freedoms are more likely to be violent with other states" (Krause 2003: 104). Although regional cooperation has taken place between non-democratic states in South Asia, democracy is thought to make it easier, as seen in South America and Europe, where the return to a democratic system helped to reinforce regional institutions and cooperation. Others have argued that "democracy *per se* does not seem to be a necessary condition for the emergence of regional cooperation, nuclear or otherwise" (Solingen 2001: 394). During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union managed to create regional security measures and arms control even though one state was authoritarian. Furthermore, the cooperation between Latin American states on nuclear non-proliferation was initiated when the states were military dictatorships, although the level of cooperation was lower than the more comprehensive agreements reached by their successors (Solingen 2001: 394).

Moreover, in the Middle East, democratization and the inclusion of wider segments of the people into political participation may lead to a strengthened rejection of Israel's nuclear monopoly. This is also supported by Buzan and Wæver (2003: 197), who argue that

"It is questionable, for example, whether Sadat and King Hussein would have been able to make deals with Israel if their countries had been democracies, and not a few regimes in the region fear that a resolution of the conflict with Israel will leave their domestic security problems at the top of the agenda".

The citation above also implies that authoritarian regimes may have a domestic reason for not pursuing peace and cooperation with Israel, because the absence of external threats to national security could increase internal pressures for political reform. Moreover, many of the regimes could also be forced to take a stronger stand against Israel, to refuse to sign treaties banning WMD, or to pursue nuclear options as the result of increased political liberalization (Karawan 1999: 72). This indicates that the type of regime may not be crucial for establishing cooperation, but that it is the strength of the domestic political coalition behind the disarmament that matters. As Solingen (2001: 394) states, "the stronger these [domestic political] arrangements are, the more they can invest such commitments with enough credibility to build faith" in cooperation. As seen in the country analyses, none of the regional governments, including Israel, have been able to build such a domestic coalition yet.

6 Conclusions

Although more than a quarter of a century has passed since the first UN resolution to create a NWFZ, and more than a decade has passed since the "Mubarak Initiative" to establish a WMDFZ, the implementation of these proposals is still not within reach. In a conflict-dominated region like the Middle East, solutions to proliferation threats are complex and have been constrained by a lack of political determination. As seen in the country analyses, the rationales behind proliferation vary between countries and time periods, ranging from security considerations to wanting to increase national prestige. Although all regional states have stated their support for a WMDFZ, no regional confidence-building measures have been implemented, and no region-wide disarmament treaty on non-conventional weapons has been concluded. The multilateral working group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) tried to address these issues, but the forum has not been assembled in more than ten years. The result of previous proposals has also largely been coupled with developments in the peace process at large. At the same time, fears of Iran's potential nuclear programme have increased the need for non-proliferation measures, because the prospect of a nuclear armed Iran could make other states more likely to proliferate.

This report has focused on the conditions that have led major states in the Middle East to consider or develop WMD. By doing this, it has been possible to identify the main issues of disagreement, which in turn can improve the possibility of identifying the conditions for success. One reason for the difficulty of creating a WMDFZ is that disarmament and the Arab-Israeli peace process can be considered as "an extension of war by other means" (Cordesman 2004: 27). Although they are goals in themselves, the processes can be seen as security struggles, where each state has its own national interests that may collide with its neighbour's interests. As seen in the country analysis, it is clear that Israel will not be fully committed to arms control and disarmament measures, until a lasting peace that removes all threats to its national existence is achieved. Conversely, the main stakeholders on the other side, Egypt, Iran and Syria, demand changes in Israel's nuclear position and the policies towards the Palestinians before they will commit to extensive disarmament (Perkovich et al. 2005: 181). In addition, Syria is reluctant to give up its chemical weapons because of the need for deterrence against Israel.

It is also clear that the issue has been subject to "a game of diplomatic posturing". For Israel, it has been easy to support the WMDFZ issue rhetorically, because nothing practical would be achieved in the absence of fundamental political change. This support has neither put the Israeli nuclear strategy under pressure, nor required any debate domestically. For the Arab states, the attempt to link a WMDFZ to the NPT has been an attempt to embarrass Israel and draw attention to its refusal to sign the treaty (Cohen 1999: 86). For both Israel and the Arab states, the rhetorical support to a WMDFZ has not constituted a political challenge, because there are no popular demands for creating a WMDFZ. Hence, there are no strong domestic coalitions on either side that pressure the states into committing to a WMDFZ. It is also worth mentioning that, as seen in the previous chapters, inter-Arab and Arab-Iranian disputes have been "at least as great a motivating force for the creation of these capabilities as any difference with Israel", although the declared purpose is in terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Jones: 2005: 6). Hence, although Arab-

Israeli disagreements are a major concern, other conflict dimensions must be kept in mind.

The report has shown that the difficulty of establishing a WMDFZ reflects the dominance of narrow national security interests and power politics, especially for Israel and Syria. For these two states, WMD are more connected with national security, and the aim of increasing internal or external prestige is therefore not that important. For Egypt and Iran, the WMD issue has a strong domestic dimension, and is also dependent on the need to secure or increase their regional standing. However, the difficulty also reflects the failure to establish a “security community”, where the states have a minimum level of common objectives (Steinberg 2005: 507).

Considerable efforts should therefore be spent on encouraging all parties to develop such a consensus. This is clearly a long term process, and achieving progress on disarmament should not necessarily be dependent on progress in the peace process. A key question is therefore how to start a disarmament process without compromising the interests of any state. It is possible to suggest a few steps both for future research and for more practical approaches to influence the involved actors.

An important step, as previously mentioned, is to overcome the absence of a common security vision. The WMDFZ is a suitable issue to focus on, since all parties in principle have agreed to the establishment of such a zone. Many regional states agree that WMD are a threat to both national and regional security, and this acknowledgement should be the focus of a future WMDFZ process as a “lowest-common-denominator” (Spiegel 2003: 90). In this regard, learning from states in other regions and from previous great power cooperation could provide important insights on how, despite large disagreements, states are able to cooperate. More specifically, one could examine the conditions leading to the establishment of existing NWFZs, as well as practical steps taken in other regions that have turned away from a competitive security environment. One example is East Asia, where considerable progress has been made in reducing the level of conflict, enabling the states to focus on economic development and national development (Morgan 2003: 69). Furthermore, in South East Asia, the creation of a WMD-free zone has recently been proposed by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). ASEAN members Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Brunei, Malaysia, Myanmar, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand are planning to sign the proposed charter during the group’s annual conference in November 2007 (National Journal Group 25.07.2007). Hence, although the Middle East has unique characteristics that complicate security relations, it should still be possible to emulate other regions and learn how to work together (Spiegel 2003: 87). As discussed in Chapter 5, the case of Libya can provide useful insights on WMD disarmament, and under what circumstances a country chooses to renounce its weapon programmes.

Moving forward on establishing a WMDFZ is also dependent on the ability of external actors, such as the United States, the EU, Russia and the United Nations to provide incentives, mediation and enforcement. They can also encourage interaction between regional states, such as an increase in trade relations, economic interactions and cultural relations, which can bind the states together in mutually beneficial interdependency relationships. Promoting elite interaction, research activity and confidence-building measures should also be given high priority, so that

regional leaders increase both their experience in working together to achieve regional goals and their knowledge of disarmament related issues. This may in turn contribute to a change in state identities and security perceptions (Spiegel 2003: 90). In this regard, the activity among the smaller Gulf States is central. Another strategy is to create an expert group to produce a “consensus document” describing the transparency and verification elements of a future WMDFZ, which could provide material for future negotiations. It would also give the process a high profile, which is important to the Arab states. In addition, it would include the views of all parties, which is important to Israel (Baumgart and Müller 2004-05: 53). Finally, in order to improve regional relations all states must recognize the existence, within agreed-upon borders, and the right to security, of all other states. Hence, all states involved must recognize Israel’s right to exist, and the right of the Palestinians to a state.

Based on the previous attempts, creating a WMDFZ in the Middle East may seem difficult. It is expected that only large and lasting changes can convince the states to give up the security that, in their view, emerges from WMD. However, focusing on the steps mentioned above may contribute to changing the mindset that has long dominated regional security policies. The shortcomings of previous attempts suggest the need for a new approach to the issue, and efforts should therefore be spent on developing frameworks for creating common visions and for changing the states’ perceptions of what constitutes national security.

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