

1

Background for Peace

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THIS CHAPTER PORTRAYS the background for this document—the developments setting the stage for an examination of the issues and opportunities discussed in this book. It ascertains the present state of the Middle East peace process and elaborates the evolution of the Middle East Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) talks. Finally, we define what we mean by “the Middle East” and discuss alternative modes for delineating the region.

Milestones

This book follows seventeen years of peace between Egypt and Israel. The treaty concluded between the two countries in 1979 stipulated that Israel withdraw its armed forces and civilians from the Sinai. The agreement also set the international boundary between Egypt and mandated Palestine as the permanent border between Egypt and Israel. Thus, for the first time the international boundary between an Arab state and Israel was defined. In addition, the treaty established a complex of security arrangements between the two countries—primarily the demilitarization of the Sinai—that

were designed to diminish their fear of surprise attack. Despite potentially destabilizing developments such as the assassination of Egypt's president Anwar Sadat and Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the Egyptian-Israeli treaty stood the test of time remarkably well.

DEFINING THE REGION

What do we mean by the Middle East? What should be the delineation of the region for arms control? A universally accepted definition of the Middle East does not exist. Increasingly, states' approach to defining the region is affected by their threat perceptions. Thus, they are inclined to include all sources of threat within their definition of the region. This tendency has been accelerated by the proliferation of mass destruction weapons and their delivery systems.

Some propose dividing the Middle East into four subregions: the central subregion of states directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Gulf subregion that includes all members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Maghreb—the Arab states of North Africa—and the states at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. The main problem with this approach is that states of the Middle East have participated in armed conflict in more than one subregion, as the 1991 Gulf War illustrates.

The U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) defines the region as comprising Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. The CIA's geographical atlas includes Turkey. Both ACDA and the CIA consider Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia as part of the African continent. Yet the U.S. Department of State's Near East bureau includes these four states but excludes Cyprus and Turkey. In this context, it is noteworthy that the Arab League includes all the states in the Near East bureau's area of responsibility with the exception of Iran and Israel but including Djibouti, Mauritania, Palestine, Somalia, and Sudan.

Faced with these competing definitions, for our discussion of arms control and regional security, we decided to adopt a delineation of the Middle East that extends from Morocco in the west to Iran in the east, and from Syria in the north to Yemen in the south. This does not preclude the possibility that specific arms control agreements might incorporate only a subset of these countries. Nor does it exclude the possibility that other arms control agreements would require the participation of other states. Thus, the substance and character of the agreement will affect the list of participants.

The post-Gulf War phase of the Middle East peace process was launched at the October 1991 international conference in Madrid, cosponsored by Russia and the United States. Subsequent negotiations were both bilateral and multilateral. Initially, the bilateral Arab-Israeli negotiations were between Israel and Syria, Israel and Lebanon, and Israel and a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. Soon thereafter, Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Jordanian negotiations were separated. By contrast, it became increasingly clear that the fate of Israeli-Lebanese negotiations were tied to the outcome of the Israeli-Syrian talks. Technically, the negotiations are based on United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 242 and 338. The Israeli-Lebanese talks are based on UNSC Resolutions 425 and 426. As stipulated in the letters of invitation to the Madrid conference, the goal of the negotiations is comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in the Middle East.

In September 1993 Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed a Declaration of Principles (DOP) in Oslo and Washington. Agreements elaborating the first phases of implementing the DOP were subsequently signed in Cairo in May 1994 and in Washington in September 1995. While the first of these inaugurated the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and Jericho, the second established Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank. The latter entails the redeployment of Israeli troops from Palestinian populated areas, the implementation of security arrangements in the West Bank, elections for a Palestinian council, and the transfer of civilian authority (over taxes, water, health care, education, and police, for example) to the Palestinian Authority. By mid-1996 these milestones were followed by the official opening of Israeli-Palestinian final status negotiations on the nature of the Palestinian political entity, its borders with Israel, the future of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, the fate of Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem, and final security arrangements.

The murder of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish assassin in November 1995 and the suicide bombings conducted by Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorist groups in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in February-March 1996 did not stop the bilateral process. On January 15, 1997, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Yasir Arafat signed an agreement stipulating the further implementation of the Oslo agreements.

In October 1994 Jordan became the second Arab state to sign a peace treaty with Israel. The agreement stipulated the return of Jordanian terri-

tory, the delineation and demarcation of the boundaries between the two countries, and a redistribution of the use of water resources.

The multilateral Middle East peace negotiations were launched in January 1992. The first organizational meeting in Moscow formed five working groups on water (chaired by the United States), on the environment (chaired by Japan), on economic development (chaired by the European Community), on refugees (chaired by Canada), and on arms control and regional security (chaired by Russia and the United States). Each working group consists of regional and extraregional parties.

In addition, a multilateral steering committee was formed to overview the peace process. Chaired by Russia and the United States, the committee was designed to monitor progress, to recommend future work such as the issuing of papers defining "a vision" for the region, and to consider the formation of additional working groups, such as a forum for addressing the "human dimension" of the Middle East.

The multilateral working groups have made substantial progress in formulating principles and developing project designs. For example, the Regional Economic Development Working Group (REDWG) completed studies for regional financial mechanisms, tourism associations, and business councils. A major outcome of REDWG was the convening of three Middle East and North Africa economic summit meetings in Morocco in October 1994, in Jordan in October 1995, and in Egypt in October 1996. The environmental working group established codes of conduct and an Upper Gulf of Aqaba oil spill contingency plan. The water working group developed a water data bank system and called for the establishment of a regional desalination research center. The working group on refugees examined issues such as health, child welfare, job creation, human resource development, and family reunification.

The ACRS Process

The ACRS working group was intended to complement the bilateral negotiations and to help create a political environment that would reduce suspicions and promote dialogue between the parties (see appendix A). Israel, the Palestinians, and thirteen Arab states are represented in these talks.

In the framework of the ACRS discussions, arms control combines structural as well as operational dimensions. Structural arms control re-

duces manpower as well as conventional and unconventional (nuclear, chemical, and biological) weapons, ultimately producing major force-reduction agreements. Operational arms control refers to efforts to prevent war by misunderstanding or miscalculation, to reduce the possibility of surprise attack, and, ultimately, to diminish the ability to use force for the purpose of political intimidation and the execution of foreign policy. Discussions in this realm focus on confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) to increase transparency and predictability.

At the conclusion of the ACRS plenary meeting in Moscow in 1993, the parties agreed to divide the process into an “operational basket” to address technical-military CSBMs and a “conceptual basket” to address political-military CSBMs. Technical-military CSBMs are tactical and operational military measures. By contrast, political-military CSBMs are “statements of intent” concerning the use of military forces. Together, CSBMs are designed to influence operational military planning and national security policy.

The operational basket includes maritime CSBMs, prenotification of military activities, exchange of military information, and the establishment of a regional communication network. The conceptual basket includes an effort to define long-term objectives on arms control and regional security, the establishment of a regional security center, verification and monitoring of arms control agreements, and other issues related to civil defense, public awareness, and military contacts and visits. It also includes seminars on topics such as the delineation of the Middle East region for the purposes of arms control, regional security arrangements, prerequisites for initiating structural arms control negotiations, military doctrines and concepts of deterrence, and threat perceptions and security concerns. It was also agreed that multilateral CSBMs as well as all other arms control measures would be implemented on a voluntary and reciprocal basis.

To increase maritime security, the ACRS working group has drafted a regional agreement on the avoidance of incidents at sea as well as on the requirements for search-and-rescue operations. A draft regional agreement on prenotification of military activities and exchange of information was negotiated, similar to the format adopted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). A communication system for the Middle East based in Egypt—similar to the OSCE communication hub in The Hague—is being studied.

The parties to the ACRS talks also decided to establish a Regional Se-

curity Center (RSC) in Jordan, with related facilities in Qatar and Tunis. Initially, the RSC is designed to host and facilitate seminars that support the ACRS process and provide training and education on arms control. It is intended to function as an integral part of the ACRS communication and data bank systems and ensure their compatibility.

The parties' efforts to conclude a Statement on Arms Control and Regional Security have become an important milestone in the ACRS process. The draft statement provided a political basis for formulating a new regionwide code of conduct and elaborated a working agenda on region-specific operational and structural arms control measures. The draft text comprises fundamental principles governing the future security relations among the region's states, guidelines for the ACRS process, and statements of intent regarding the objectives of the ACRS process.

Efforts to adopt the statement failed because of the remaining gaps between the Egyptian and Israeli approaches to controlling weapons of mass destruction. Arab and Israeli participants in the ACRS process agreed that the statement should call for the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons as well as their delivery systems. The Egyptian delegation argued, however, that as a first step toward achieving this objective, all the region's states should adhere to the 1968 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). By contrast, Israel rejected the possibility that the statement would contain a direct obligation to adhere to the treaty (see appendix B for alternative language proposed by the two parties as well as by the United States). At the closing of the 1994 ACRS plenary meeting in Tunis, this disagreement was the only remaining obstacle to the adoption of the statement.