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Bridging the Gap: Resolving the Security Dilemma in the Middle East

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FOR ALMOST FIVE DECADES, states in the Middle East have made every attempt to enhance their security, mostly with little regard to the extent to which these efforts have undermined the security of their neighbors. This was unfortunate because while short-term security requirements could be met in such a fashion, in the longer term this policy proved self-defeating. States whose security was negatively affected by their neighbors' security-enhancing measures took steps to diminish the perceived threat. In turn, these countermeasures sometimes reduced the security of the state whose security-enhancing efforts began the chain reaction. This points to the main dilemma of international and regional security: how states might enhance their security without thereby diminishing the security of their neighbors. Addressing this dilemma and suggesting methods of mitigating its effects in the Middle East is the main purpose of this chapter.

As the second and third chapters of this book demonstrate, the considerable progress made in Arab–Israeli peacemaking in recent years has not removed all concerns of the region's states with regard to one another's

political intentions, military and strategic capabilities, and defense doctrines. While a serious attempt to begin addressing these concerns was launched in early 1992 in the framework of the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group, a significant number of Middle East states remain outside the process. Moreover, even among the parties taking part in the ACRS talks, the progress made is yet to result in a meaningful consensus regarding the nature and true magnitude of their remaining concerns as well as about the best manner of addressing them.

The first sections of this chapter elaborate the gap that still needs to be bridged between the parties' security concerns and their views with regard to the best manner of addressing them. Then, proposals for closing this gap and enhancing Middle East regional security will be made at five levels: (1) affecting the manner in which the region's states think about their security affairs; (2) strengthening the process launched by the ACRS working group of the multilateral Middle East peace negotiations; (3) expanding the Middle East track-II talks; (4) establishing a Middle East Co-operative Security Framework (MECSF) to enhance the security of the region's states through military as well as nonmilitary means; and (5) ensuring America's continued engagement in the Middle East.

Arab Concerns

The breakthroughs achieved in Arab–Israeli peacemaking in recent years did not eliminate all sources of Arab concern with regard to Israel's strategic capabilities and its military force structure and doctrine. Primarily, Arab states continue to express their uneasiness with regard to Israel's nuclear potential and its implications for regional stability. Their assessment is that Israel already enjoys an unquestioned conventional superiority and that in the new regional security environment emerging in the aftermath of the peace agreements between Israel and the adjacent Arab countries and the PLO, Israel no longer faces military threats to its existence that might justify the possession of nuclear weapons as a strategic deterrent or as a “weapon of last resort.”

At the conceptual level, Arabs view the nuclear issue as representing a core issue of the Arab–Israeli conflict. In their eyes, Israel's acquisition of strategic and conventional deterrence, coupled with its offensive military posture, produced a provocative political atmosphere rather than an envi-

ronment conducive to the prevention of conflict and war. The Arab states also believe that Israel's alleged nuclear doctrine of "weapon of last resort" would not be binding in case of war. In their view it should be interpreted instead as implying the legitimization of nuclear weapons for military purposes in conventional confrontations, and therefore as an open-ended prescription for nuclear proliferation.

Consequently, the Arab states demand that Israel sign the 1968 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and open its nuclear facilities to international inspections. Arab states insist that international instruments such as the NPT enhance national security. They view the NPT as a stand-alone international legal instrument that should not be made hostage to regional politics. In this context Arab states insist that the first stage of implementing nuclear arms control in the region would be universal membership in the NPT and international monitoring of all nuclear facilities. They also regard the support of such international instruments as consistent with the idea that the substance and aims of the regional arms control and security-building process should complement the substance and pace of international global arms control instruments. These Arab states do not exclude the possibility that the second stage of implementing arms control agreements will focus on regional frameworks.

The Arab states also do not consider Iran to be a threat to Israel's existence. Consequently, they reject suggestions that the signing of global arms control agreements should be made contingent on Iran's behavior. Moreover, in their judgment peace agreements between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinians would deprive Iran of any political context in which to confront Israel.

Arab states also believe that an Israeli decision to join the NPT will provide the ACRS process a much-needed boost. Such a step is viewed as potentially making it easier for Arab states to begin considering and implementing more ambitious confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) and structural arms control in the conventional realm.

Yet the nuclear issue is not the only component of Israeli deterrence that Arab states continue to find troubling. As mentioned earlier, these states regard Israel's offensive military doctrine, the high mobility of the IDF's force structure allowing the implementation of this doctrine, and Israel's commitment to maintaining the qualitative edge of its armed forces as threatening regional stability and their national security. In this context even Arab analysts who view Israel's motivation for adopting this doctrine

and force structure as defensive emphasize that Arab states cannot ignore the possibility that this capability will be used by a future Israeli government for offensive purposes.

The Arab states also reject Israel's insistence that it must possess the capacity to deter and defend against a potential coalition of Arab armed forces. They view the peace process as ending the Arab–Israeli conflict, and they regard force and contingency planning against a reemergence of an Arab war coalition as inconsistent with Mideast peace. They also see Israel's desire to balance such a coalition as leading to a continuing arms race and a way of establishing and maintaining Israeli military dominance in the region—a proposition they find unacceptable.

At the political–strategic level, Arabs fear that the peace process may be stalled or reversed by political change in Israel. The new Israeli government might avoid meaningful Israeli–Palestinian final status negotiations and prevent Israeli–Syrian and Israeli–Lebanese accords by rejecting the return of territories and a withdrawal of IDF forces. It is feared that such a development would rekindle Arab–Israeli violence in the West Bank and across adjacent Arab states and result eventually in another Arab–Israeli war. Such a war might be extremely devastating, possibly escalating to the use of mass destruction weapons.

Israeli Concerns

On its part, Israel remains uncertain about the future of its regional security environment. It views the Middle East as an arena that continues to experience a grand struggle between the forces of the old and the new Middle East—those supporting Arab–Israeli accommodation and regional economic development and those opposed to the Madrid peace process and determined to erode economic development with the hope that the resulting public resentment might hasten revolutionary change. Within this context Israel is particularly concerned about the numerous Iranian public statements reflecting deep hostility toward Israel as well as by Iran's perceived attempts to acquire a nuclear potential and ballistic missiles that could reach Israel.

At the same time, Israelis are concerned that support for peacemaking is thin even among Arab countries that concluded peace agreements with Israel, and they are worried that these Arab governments face considerable

domestic opposition. In turn, this breeds an Israeli fear that a possible triumph of Arab forces who are opposed to the peace process might result in its reversal. In this context Israelis continue to feel uneasy about the many strengths of the Arab states—their vast territories, large populations, oil resources and resulting wealth, and their ability to field large, regular conventional forces.

Moreover, Israel's view is that in the aftermath of the bilateral peace agreements, Arab countries no longer face serious military threats. In this new security environment, Israel sees little reason for Egypt, Syria, and other Arab states to continue maintaining large conventional force structures. The fact that, despite the absence of serious external threats, Egypt invests enormous resources in modernizing its large armed forces continues to puzzle many Israelis.

While the peace agreements to be concluded between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon hold the promise of completing the bilateral peace process between Israel and all its immediate Arab neighbors—thus improving the chances of Israel's complete integration in the region—the depth of territorial withdrawals that Israel is required to make is widely viewed as only increasing its strategic vulnerability. In the judgment of some Israelis, this should lead their country to maintain its qualitative edge as well as other components of its grand strategy—such as its offensive military doctrine—as a hedge against a possible reversal of the Arab–Israeli peace process.

In Israel's view, a similar logic applies to its nuclear policy. While Israel shares the nuclear nonproliferation objectives reflected in the NPT, it regards the signing of the treaty and the transparency entailed in exposing its nuclear facilities to full-scope safeguards as inconsistent with the imperative of maintaining its ambiguous nuclear status. This ambiguity has been part of Israel's national security concept for a number of decades. In Israel's view this posture should not be altered until all serious threats to its security and survival have been removed.

In this context, Israel places continued emphasis on the hostile intentions and growing capabilities of Iran, particularly its interest in developing a nuclear option. Israel is determined to deter such threats and would not accept a major erosion of its deterrence until this threat is removed. This also explains Israel's approach to the region's delineation: since Iran presents a major potential threat, structural arms control cannot be applied

in the Middle East until Iran is incorporated into the new regime and assumes all the constraints and limitations entailed in its establishment.

Finally, Israel's judgment is that once conditions are ripe for structural arms control in the nuclear realm, a regionally focused agreement would be far more effective than existing international instruments. In Israel's view, such an approach, reflected in the suggested weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone, would provide a much closer match between arms control and the efforts to advance conflict resolution and confidence building in the region. In addition, as the Tlatelolco treaty transforming Latin America into a nuclear weapon-free zone (NWFZ) demonstrates, such an approach would allow the adoption of far more effective verification measures than those currently associated with the NPT: in addition to IAEA full-scope safeguards, such an agreement would allow the construction of a regional verification mechanism and the adoption of reciprocal on-site inspections.

Bridging the Gap

As the preceding sections illustrate, there remains a wide gap between the threat perceptions and security concerns of Israel and the Arab states as well as in their continued tendency to exacerbate the security dilemma by attempting to increase their security at the expense of their neighbors. In the next sections we propose five mutually reinforcing avenues for bridging the gap between the parties' perceptions and concerns and for helping them resolve the security dilemma or at least mitigate its effects.

Changing Security Perceptions

The prerequisite for building institutions and mechanisms allowing the region's states to mitigate the security dilemma is that they begin to think differently about their national security affairs. In the first instance, governments must become aware of the security dilemma. Awareness of the dilemma is essential for persuading states that when alternative modes for enhancing security exist, efforts should be made to pursue those that promise a substantial measure of security while posing the least threat to neighboring states. Governments might then forgo steps that may result in improved short-term security if they become aware that such steps

would result in diminished security in the long term. Overall, this implies that governments cease thinking about maximizing security at all costs and begin to think about striking a new balance between deterrence and reassurance, between meeting their security requirements and attending to the security perceptions of their neighbors.

A related required perceptual change is that states begin to view arms control and confidence building as part of their national security policy. Embedded in their previously hostile environment is the tendency of most states in the Middle East to regard any limitation on their freedom of action, such as the imposition of transparency measures, as potentially detrimental to their national security. With a less-hostile environment emerging, the region's states must begin to realize that constraints on their freedom of action may result in enhanced security if these limitations reduce their neighbors' anxieties and propensity to take dangerous action.

Finally, as the Middle East is slowly transformed into a more benign environment, the region's states must drop another mode of thinking characteristic of hostile relationships: the tendency to exaggerate threats and to emphasize their own vulnerabilities and weaknesses. For example, greater familiarity with Israeli society may persuade Arabs that they can safely abandon fears that their states, with a combined population of some 250 million, could suffer from the "hegemonic designs" of a country with a population of about 5 million. Similarly, Israelis might remember that their "soft belly" is less soft than is commonly believed: the IDF does not face a serious challenger along Israel's eastern border and would have ample time to react if such a challenge were to result from the entry of any large expeditionary forces into Jordan.

A more balanced assessment of their security problems based on a less exaggerated view of their neighbors' capabilities and intentions and a more accurate appreciation of their own strengths would lead Middle East states to diminish their propensity to take measures that exacerbate the security dilemma. Thus, the tendency to take unilateral self-help measures would be gradually replaced by an emerging "common security culture," focused on enhancing overall security in the region. Clearly, it would be unrealistic to expect the region's states to complete such a dramatic mental transformation prior to the achievement of comprehensive peace. Their governments and influential elites, however, should be encouraged to begin thinking differently about their countries' security without delay.

Enhancing the ACRS Process

The second important step that can be taken to strengthen security in the Middle East is to enhance the ACRS talks. These discussions, sponsored by Russia and the United States, are conducted as one of the five working groups launched by the organizational meeting of the multilateral Middle East peace negotiations in Moscow in early 1992. At the outset of the ACRS talks, the Arab states and Israel disagreed about the agenda. The Arab states stressed that these talks should first deal with the danger of nuclear proliferation in the region, since this involves the most destructive and hence the most destabilizing weapons. Conversely, Israel argued that sensitive issues involving the parties' strategic deterrence can be dealt with only after a high level of mutual confidence and trust has been established. As a compromise, the regional participants agreed that structural arms control should be addressed parallel to a Helsinki-type and Stockholm-type confidence- and security-building process and await progress in the bilateral Arab-Israeli negotiations.

In this spirit the parties accepted the cosponsors' suggestion that the ACRS talks address two main issues: the definition of "visionary goals" for arms control in the Middle East—in this framework the nuclear issue could achieve its due prominence—and a parallel effort to implement confidence- and security-building measures. To carry out this agenda, external sponsors were nominated to orchestrate the work on each of the main items: Russia and the United States for the effort to define the objectives of arms control in the Middle East; Canada for confidence building in the maritime realm; Turkey for the exchange of military information and prenotification of major military movements; and the Netherlands for communication.

Three factors contributed to the success of the ACRS talks. First, little media attention was given to their proceedings, which made them less exposed to political sensitivities. Second, the intersessional meetings conducted in their framework, free of media attention, provided an excellent setting for informal discussions and greater familiarity between senior officers of the region's armed forces. There were numerous frank exchanges allowing better understanding of each other's requirements and concerns. Finally, the cosponsors of this process exercised the right balance between guidance and nonintervention. While providing essential assistance, they avoided any attempt to impose themselves, particularly in determining the outcome of these talks.

By late 1993 the work of the various intersessional meetings was reorganized in the form of two “baskets”: the conceptual basket was primarily intended to define the ultimate objectives of confidence building and arms control in the region and to produce a political-declaratory confidence-building and arms control measure by formulating and making public a “Statement on Arms Control and Regional Security” defining these objectives. In parallel the operational basket was intended to advance the wide array of technical–military CSBMs described earlier.

From 1992 to 1994 impressive progress was made in negotiating CSBMs in the framework of the ACRS talks. A regional communication system was initiated, at first serving the exchange of information related to ACRS activities. It was temporarily attached to the CSCE Communication Center in the Netherlands but is intended to be permanently located in Cairo within the next few years. Also, the parties decided to establish a Regional Security Center (RSC) in Jordan with related facilities in Qatar and Tunisia. In addition to performing similar functions to the CSCE Conflict Prevention Center (CPC) in Vienna, the proposed regional body would study and carry out more long-term conflict resolution activities. The RSC would also provide training in conflict prevention, conflict management and resolution, and confidence building and arms control for young interns from governments and NGOs throughout the Middle East.

The ACRS talks also made considerable progress in advancing specific confidence-building measures. By early 1995 understandings were reached on two maritime security-building measures: cooperation in search-and-rescue (SAR) operations and in preventing incidents at sea (IAS). Another consensus was obtained regarding prenotification of major military activities, exercises and other movement of forces, and on a more general exchange of military-related data.

Yet in all cases it was agreed that participation in the mechanisms adopted and the activities proposed would take place on a voluntary and reciprocal basis. Indeed, the parties have not yet agreed to implement a set of confidence- and security-building measures on a regionwide basis. This suggests that some parties were still unsure about the implications of the ACRS process and its future, and that the region was still in transition to a new security environment.

At the same time, an objective examination of the ACRS talks must yield the conclusion that they have been an impressive success. The starting point of these talks was much more complex than that of the NATO–

Warsaw Pact talks of the mid-1970s: As a multilateral process the ACRS discussions were bound to be more complicated than the bilateral East–West process. Also, the Middle East talks were initiated between parties that had a recent history of bloody battles, whereas the European process was free of the emotional heritage of violence. NATO and Warsaw Pact forces never fought one another.

Moreover, by the time the Helsinki Final Act was concluded, it had been some thirty years since the parties involved were last engaged in a deadly conflict. In contrast to the near-total absence of direct discourse between the Arab states and Israel until President Sadat's journey to Jerusalem in late 1977, the Soviet Union and the United States maintained an embassy in each other's capital and kept open channels of communication between their respective governments throughout the Cold War. Still, it took the two blocs some ten years to travel from Helsinki to the Stockholm agreement. By contrast, in less than four years the ACRS talks yielded a draft document at least as ambitious as the Helsinki Final Act and a series of CSBMs, some of which extend beyond those adopted at Stockholm.

Its enormous success notwithstanding, the ACRS process has already reached a crossroads at which the parties must choose a future course: the place of nuclear arms control on the ACRS agenda. The process may encounter two other crossroads as well: the possible entrance of Syria and Lebanon into the talks, and engaging other members of the Arab League and Iran.

Nuclear Arms Control

So far, the ACRS discussions have yielded an embryonic regional CSBM regime and a document charting the ultimate purposes of the process—agreed upon by the parties involved except for one item: the parties' commitments in the realm of nuclear arms control. This progress has been consistent with the sequential approach adopted in the East–West context. The CSBM regime inaugurated in Helsinki and Stockholm created the conditions allowing the negotiation of structural arms control agreements: the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) in Europe, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), and the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty.

However, while this sequence met Israel's priorities as well as its objective of gaining Arab recognition and increased integration in the region, it did not accord with the urgency with which Arab states regard the task of

negotiating structural arms control, particularly in the nuclear realm. By mid-1995 there was a danger that the disappointment of Arab states at their failure to obtain Israeli signature of the NPT during the April Review and Extension Conference would also have a negative impact on the ACRS process.

On the other hand, there are at least two significant reasons why the transition to structural arms control is bound to be more difficult and hence must be managed more carefully in the Middle East than it was in the East-West negotiations. Most important, there are different structural asymmetries in the region. Some were purposefully developed in order to compensate for the others: the development of Israel's nuclear option was seen as part of its response to the Arab states' numerical advantage, while the acquisition of surface-to-surface missiles by a number of Arab states was viewed as compensating for the qualitative superiority of the Israeli air force. These historical and substantive linkages reveal the difficulty of negotiating one structural asymmetry without simultaneously addressing others as well.

Second, in East-West (NATO-Warsaw Pact and Soviet-U.S.) negotiations, all relevant parties were present. Thus, in the framework of the INF and CFE treaties, all countries possessing relevant capabilities were involved, and START negotiations avoided lower ceilings that might have required taking the nuclear forces of other parties—Britain, China, and France—into account. By contrast, key Middle East players remain outside the ACRS process: Lebanon and Syria have so far declined invitations to join the talks, while other members of the Arab League and Iran remain outside the process. Given that most of these states possess relevant force structures and are major sources of proliferation concerns, it is difficult to see how negotiations on structural arms control in the Middle East could be conducted without their participation.

While these problems present significant obstacles to structural arms control negotiations, Arab concerns could be taken into consideration by initiating a preparatory process in which the parties could enter extensive but informal preliminary consultations on the requirements of structural arms control in the region: identifying the relevant participants, examining the preconditions for negotiations and implementation, ascertaining the linkages between the various issues and the best ways of managing these linkages, and studying alternative methods of verifying compliance with prospective agreements. In addition to track-I talks (formal negotiations

between governments), the parties may adopt a track-II approach, allowing consultations and the commissioning of studies by international experts on the issues involved. Use could also be made of the proposed RSC in Jordan and the related facilities in Qatar and Tunisia for conducting some of the requisite studies.

While beginning to meet Arab priorities, Israel's concerns would have to be addressed about the possibility that the ACRS talks might slide prematurely into negotiating structural arms control that focuses exclusively on the nuclear issue. For this purpose, a clear understanding would have to be reached that structural arms control must involve all major categories of weapons: conventional weapons, ballistic missiles, and chemical, biological, and nuclear arms. This will allow the launching of initial discussions on conventional force reductions as well as on the possible transformation of the region into a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction.

Israel's concerns about the possibility that structural arms control discussions may experience a "slippery slope" slide into premature substantive negotiations might also be alleviated by a better appreciation of the obstacles facing any such discussions and, consequently, of the length of time it would take to resolve the problems entailed. Indeed, while in Europe it took over ten years from the initiation of the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) talks to the conclusion of the CFE treaty, discussions of a similar nature in the Middle East are likely to take even longer. This can be expected in light of the many asymmetries that discussions of structural arms control in the Middle East would have to confront: the parties' very different threat perceptions and the fact that most of the region's states face threats of varying magnitude from several directions; the asymmetry in the quality and quantities of their armed forces and the different weapons systems deployed by these forces; their different sensitivity to casualties; their differing ability to bear financial and other costs; the disparity in geography and in the resulting distribution of tactical and strategic depth; the cultural-technological asymmetries and the resulting gaps in the pace of mobilization and in the rate at which new weapons systems can be absorbed and integrated into the existing force structures; and finally, differences in political systems and their effect on options for mass mobilization.

Peace between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon

A second crossroad that the ACRS talks might reach within the next years involves the possible peace agreements between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon. When this occurs, it would be important to make every effort to integrate Syria and Lebanon into the ACRS process. Both countries refused to join any of the multilateral talks until there is a breakthrough in their bilateral negotiations with Israel. Given the size and composition of Syria's armed forces and its strategic role in the region, Syria's participation would be essential both for a meaningful application of regionwide CSBMs and for conducting structural arms control consultations and eventual negotiations and implementation.

It should be noted that within the ACRS process, every effort was made to ensure that when additional parties joined the process, their constructive suggestions would be taken into account. Nevertheless, ACRS participants should reaffirm that matters concluded within the framework of their talks will not be reopened to objections aimed at jeopardizing the success of the process.

Other Members of the Arab League and Iran

A much more sensitive issue concerns the future relationship between the ACRS talks and relevant parties who have not been invited. Some of the members of the Arab League and Iran remain significant regional powers and comprise major sources of proliferation concern. As noted earlier, it would be impossible to implement comprehensive CSBMs as well as structural arms control in the Middle East without their active participation.

The integration of some of these parties into the ACRS process has become all the more important in light of the advent of modern technology. Until recently, security issues in the Arab-Israeli arena could be considered separately from Gulf security issues. The Gulf region was not directly affected by the 1948, 1956, 1967, 1970, and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, and eight years of the Iran-Iraq war did not affect the Arab-Israeli arena. This is no longer the case. The proliferation of long-range ballistic missiles as well as long-range strike aircraft has made the two subregions sensitive to developments in one another. This was experienced clearly

during the 1991 Gulf War when Iraq fired more than forty extended-range SCUD missiles at Israel. It illustrates most clearly that limitations on ballistic missiles in the Middle East cannot be applied in only one of the two subregions; rather they would have to be applied in the region at large.

In view of the bloody history of the Arab–Israeli conflict, the modest progress made in the framework of the ACRS talks should be considered quite remarkable. At the same time, it should be recognized that these talks have reached one important juncture that will determine their future vitality: the ability to weave preliminary consultations regarding the prospects of structural arms control into the process. Two other important junctures will be: the manner in which ACRS participants will deal with the possible entry of Lebanon and Syria into the ACRS talks, and the extent to which efforts should be made to engage other Arab League members and Iran in the ACRS talks.

Whether the ACRS framework can survive these challenges remains an open question, particularly given the interrelationships between some of the decisions entailed. For example, the implementation of comprehensive structural arms control is extremely unlikely without the participation of all major sources of proliferation concern. Yet the admission of these states into the process would require a major policy change on the part of all the parties concerned.

Future Phases of the ACRS Process

What, then, is the sequence of developments in the ACRS process that we envisage? How is it likely to be linked to the evolving bilateral efforts to resolve the Arab–Israeli conflict? At the present phase of the peace process—following the establishment of Egyptian–Israeli and Israeli–Jordanian peace, the implementation of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) between Israel and the Palestinians, and the intermittent Israeli–Syrian and Israeli–Lebanese negotiations—the parties should make the proposed Regional Security Center operational, using it as a principal venue for conducting seminars and training on concepts of arms control and regional security. In addition, preliminary discussions could be held regarding competing concepts of structural arms control and regional monitoring and verification techniques. This could lead to a consensus regarding the text of a “Statement on Arms Control and Regional Security” in the Middle East.

The second phase would be characterized by the signing of bilateral peace agreements between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon and by meaningful progress in Israeli–Palestinian final status negotiations. At this stage the RSC would be functioning in Jordan as well as in Qatar and Tunisia, a regional communication system would be established in Cairo, and a set of CSBMs would be fully implemented by ACRS participants: prenotification of military exercises, exchange of military information, and joint exercises of mechanisms and procedures for avoiding incidents at sea and for cooperating in search-and-rescue operations. In addition, mechanisms required for structural arms control negotiations and for establishing appropriate verification and monitoring systems could be elaborated. Within this framework, consensus would be reached regarding the definition of the Middle East region, which would determine the countries participating in the envisaged negotiations.

The third phase would follow the conclusion of Israeli–Palestinian final status negotiations and the successful implementation of the agreement reached, as well as the participation of Iran and Iraq in the peace process and the fulfillment of other conditions allowing their inclusion in regional arms control negotiations. At this phase, implementation of structural arms control and associated verification and monitoring systems, as well as operational confidence- and security-building measures, would begin. In addition, the scope of RSC activities would be expanded to include crisis management, conflict resolution, and conflict prevention.

Expanding Track-II Talks

Regional and bilateral peace and security in the Middle East can also be enhanced by maintaining and expanding the channels for track-II discussions between the region's states. This refers to the parties' ability to engage each other in informal talks regarding their respective aspirations and objectives, their threat perceptions and security concerns, and the manner in which they propose to meet their objectives and to address their sources of concern. These track-II talks can be conducted in informal settings by independent scholars and senior journalists as well as by government officials and senior military officers acting in an independent capacity.

Track-II talks have already proven to be very useful in Arab–Israeli peacemaking. Lengthy informal discussions between independent Israeli scholars and PLO officials, held under the auspices of Norway's Institute

for Applied Social Sciences (FAFO), paved the way to the September 1993 Israel–PLO Oslo agreement. As noted earlier, this agreement had enormous impact on other dimensions of Arab–Israeli negotiations, eventually leading to the Israel–Jordan peace treaty.

Less dramatic but equally significant, track-II discussions have also been useful in supporting the ACRS process and in advancing the dialogue on security and arms control in the Middle East. Some of these discussions took place during the late 1980s, but their intensity increased dramatically after the 1991 Gulf War. These talks were conducted under the auspices of a large number of research institutes and nongovernmental organizations: the Quakers, PUGWASH, the Search for Common Ground, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Mershon Center at Ohio State University, the Institut Français des Relations Internationales, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the University of California’s Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, and the University of California at Los Angeles.

These activities could not have taken place without the support provided by a number of philanthropic foundations, primarily Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Ploughshares Fund. On some occasions government financial assistance was essential to the success of these nongovernment activities. Notably, the U.S. Department of Energy played an important role in allowing a number of track-II meetings to take place.

The most important advantage of these talks is that their informal character allows participants to explore sensitive issues that cannot be discussed in formal negotiations and to examine possibilities for resolving problems in an uncommitted fashion. Equally important, the informal settings and frameworks in which these discussions take place allow participants to express their perceptions and concerns and to learn about their neighbors’ worries and fears. By sharing their experience and impressions with their countries’ government officials, participants can improve the understanding of their governments’ track-I negotiators.

Track-II talks may prove particularly useful in advancing the prospects for arms control and regional security in the Middle East when the ACRS track-I talks reach a deadlock. Under such circumstances, unofficial and nonbinding discussions can help the search for ways of overcoming the stalemate. When conditions hinder the parties’ ability to overcome the deadlock, track-II talks can reduce tensions and mitigate other possible

negative consequences of the stalemate. In addition, they allow participants in track-I talks to stay in touch with one another, so that the gains made in the interpersonal dimensions of the ACRS talks are not lost.

Another important potential advantage of the track-II frameworks is that in principle they enable the participation of individuals from states that have opted to stay out of the ACRS talks or that have not been invited to take part in these deliberations. In the past this allowed a better appreciation of Syria's perceptions and concerns as well as a better understanding of Lebanon's fears and aspirations. In the future, changes in Iran and Iraq may allow more effective participation in track-II talks by individuals from Tehran and Baghdad. The key role of these countries that affect security in the Gulf states and in the Middle East at large makes their eventual participation in these talks essential.

Given their proven utility and the low level of risk involved, every possible effort must be made to maintain these channels of informal communication and to expand their scope and intensity. This is important even when rapid progress is made in track-I discussions—notably the ACRS talks—because formal negotiations are bound to experience occasional difficulties. Even if these formal negotiations are concluded successfully, the implementation of the resulting agreements is often associated with tensions that must be defused. Therefore, continuous track-II talks may be useful during formal negotiations as well as in their aftermath.

Constructing a Middle East Cooperative Security Framework

While the ACRS process has already achieved considerable success—in absolute terms and particularly by Middle East standards—one realm in which it has not had sufficient impact is in changing public perceptions. Only a small number of senior officials and nongovernment observers in the countries taking part in the ACRS talks are aware that a new, if still limited, spirit of cooperation is developing between Israel and a large number of Arab states. Paradoxically, this lack of awareness is the result of a major source of the success of the ACRS process: the same low visibility that made the process less sensitive politically is also responsible for the fact that the publics of the region's states remain largely unaware of its achievements.

The danger entailed in this lack of awareness is that peoples' thinking would continue to be conditioned by the logic of "the old Middle East,"

which would make current positive developments too easy to reverse. To diminish this danger, the ACRS process should be complemented by the establishment of a Middle East Cooperative Security Framework (MECSF). The proposed MECSF would be based on Article VIII of the United Nations Charter calling for the creation of "regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action, provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the purposes of the U.N."

The purpose of the new framework would be to enhance the security of the region's states through military as well as nonmilitary means. In the foreseeable future the new framework would not replace the ACRS process nor would it replicate the measures already considered and the arrangements already adopted by ACRS participants. In this sense it would initially differ from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, in the framework of which many of the measures proposed at the ACRS talks were originally implemented in Europe.

The principal difference between the MECSF and the ACRS talks would be that the MECSF would be run by the region's states, not by external sponsors. Hence, the creation of the MECSF would itself signal to the various publics in the region that the Middle East peace process has matured. This message would be transmitted powerfully by the manner in which the MECSF is conducted. Its annual conference would be given high visibility and the parties' delegations would be chaired by their respective heads of state or their ministers of foreign affairs or defense.

This is not meant to exclude the participation of outside powers in the proposed MECSF. Quite the contrary, countries that affect the region's security and prosperity should be encouraged to join the MECSF as associate members. As elaborated below, this applies especially to the United States, whose unique role in maintaining and enhancing the region's stability makes its participation in the MECSF essential. Similarly, Russia's proximity to the region and its historical role and interests in the Middle East justify that it take an active part in all MECSF deliberations and activities.

Another major distinction between the two forums is that while the ACRS talks focus on arms control and confidence building, the MECSF would also deal with conflict prevention through the eventual integration of the RSC into its framework. As such, the MECSF would devote a large

part of its energy and resources to mitigating the sources of conflict in the region and to addressing factors that sustain high levels of tension: from tangible border demarcation disputes to less tangible factors such as the propagation of myths and the propensity to portray adversaries in demonic terms. For this purpose, the MECSF would engage in different activities, ranging from preventive diplomacy—including the “standby” availability of multinational teams of diplomats ready to be dispatched to resolve disputes before they escalate into full-scale conflict—to programs designed to move the region from confrontational security policies into cooperative security frameworks.

In attempting to diminish the propensity for mythmaking and demonization in the region, the MECSF would conduct a significant regionwide educational effort to demolish the various myths held by different publics about one another. For example, it could dispel the myth held by many Israelis that “Jordan is Palestine,” that the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan could be transformed into an entity that would meet the Palestinians’ demand for independent statehood. The myth held by many Arabs that they are threatened by Israel’s determination to expand “from the Nile to the Euphrates” could be similarly debunked.

A major effort that the MECSF could undertake in this context is to help delete myths and expressions of demonization from textbooks used in schools throughout the region. This would require that committees nominated by the MECSF would examine these textbooks and that once myths and expressions of demonization are identified, they would recommend changes in the text. Related to this, the MECSF could convene meetings of historians from the region’s various states and encourage them to bridge gaps between competing interpretations of their past relations. This might diminish the likelihood that disagreement about their histories would contribute in the future to the type of violence experienced in the Balkans.

The contrast between the proposed MECSF and the ACRS talks would also be manifested in other important respects. While ACRS and other working groups initiated by the 1992 Moscow conference were designed to support the Arab–Israeli bilateral peace process launched in Madrid, the MECSF is intended to strengthen security and cooperation in the region at large. As such, it would address issues that affect the region’s security but are independent of Arab–Israeli peacemaking. In this sense the

MECSF would be a much more truly multilateral process than the Madrid framework.

In addition, while the ACRS talks have addressed the military dimensions of security almost exclusively, the MECSF would examine other determinants of the region's security, such as economic development, that affect the internal stability of the region's states. An important issue largely ignored by the Moscow-initiated working groups is energy and its impact on the region's stability. For example, securing the safe flow of oil is of paramount interest not only to consumer states but also to Middle East states. Interruption may induce external intervention, which would diminish the sovereignty of the region's states. Another issue that should be on the MECSF agenda is demography: population growth and immigration pose a growing danger to regional stability. Thus, the nonmilitary dimensions of Middle East security would figure prominently in MECSF discussions and activities.

Finally, because the MECSF would be run by the region's states rather than by external cosponsors, participants would enjoy greater freedom to determine their group's membership. As such, the founders may choose to invite all the region's states and to decide whether or not there will be conditions for membership. If they decide to set conditions, the founders would also be able to determine what these conditions should be, through what process they might be formulated and adopted, and how compliance with these conditions should be verified.

Once the ACRS process matures to the point where the sponsors' contribution is no longer essential, and once significant countries in the region that are not parties to the ACRS process join the MECSF, the orchestration of regionwide CSBMs and other arms control measures initiated by ACRS could be transferred to the MECSF. At that point, MECSF members might also determine the relationship between the MECSF and extraregional countries. For example, they may choose to grant some of these countries observer status in MECSF meetings and activities. They would also have to formulate the best manner of ensuring that arrangements and limitations adopted by MECSF members would be respected by these extraregional powers as well.

In the event that significant countries in or outside the Middle East would decline the obligations entailed in joining the MECSF and continue to pose threats to regional stability, the states representing "the new Middle East" should combine their efforts to resist these threats through col-

lective security mechanisms. Such activities would be based on Article VII of the UN Charter, which allows “action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression.” The main purpose of the collective security framework would be to deter and to defend against threats to the region’s states. Thus, states may choose to consider an attack on any member of the framework as a challenge to all its members. Moreover, defensive measures currently adopted by individual states could be placed at the disposal of the collective security framework, which would reduce the likelihood that they would be regarded as threatening. Indeed, the proposed MECSF as well as the fallback collective security framework would contribute to stability by reducing the propensity of the region’s states to take unilateral measures against perceived threats.

America’s Continued Engagement

Since the Second World War, U.S. involvement in the Middle East has played a major role in stabilizing the region, and America’s engagement will remain a central factor affecting the security of the region for the foreseeable future. Hence, this continued engagement in various facets of the region’s affairs should be encouraged.

Serving America’s interests in the Middle East, U.S. policies have had a variety of stabilizing effects on the region at large, including

- Facilitating Arab–Israeli negotiations by mediation, by acting as an “honest broker,” and by insisting that there is no substitute for face-to-face talks.
- Encouraging a multilateral effort to address the region’s pressing problems: economic development, refugees, water resources, the environment, and weapons proliferation. America’s role as a prime sponsor of these talks was essential to any gains made in the development of frameworks for solving the problems.
- Deterring radical regimes from engaging in international terrorism and from posing serious threats to the security and survival of the region’s moderate states.
- Entering into various forms of strategic cooperation with the region’s moderate governments in order to increase their capacity to deter and defend themselves against external threats.
- Transferring military hardware and technologies to moderate govern-

ments, which increased their capacity to defend themselves against radical neighbors.

- Limiting the transfer of technology and material to the region's "rogue regimes" to prevent them from developing or obtaining mass destruction weapons and the capacity to deliver these weapons to neighboring states and more-distant targets.
- Providing economic assistance aimed at reducing deprivation. The resulting improved economic conditions may diminish the extent to which the lower strata among the region's states would seek to relieve their misery in extremist movements.
- Promoting measured democratization, human rights, and free enterprise, as well as a vibrant middle class and a business community that encourage policies to increase economic prosperity—not conflict and war.

The combined impact of these policies contributed to the gradual evolution of a new Middle East—transforming the region from a realm of violence to an arena of negotiations and conflict resolution. Indeed, it is difficult to see how Arab–Israeli peacemaking could have advanced without the cumulative moderating effects of U.S. policies in the region. In the future as well, U.S. continuous commitment to the security of the region's moderate governments and forces will be essential to ensuring stability in the Middle East. Indeed, should the proposal presented here be adopted and a Middle East Cooperative Security Framework be created to complement the states' pursuit of national security, the United States should take part in this new framework as an active associate member.

Thus, the final suggestion is that the United States should remain engaged in the Middle East and that it continue to pursue policies that enhance the region's stability. U.S. efforts in the region have registered significant gains, notably the impressive progress made in Arab–Israeli peacemaking. Washington should not abandon its successful policies in favor of less-certain pursuits.

Conclusions

Bridging the gap between Arab and Israeli threat perceptions and security concerns as well as between their respective approaches to arms control

and to national and regional security requires a web of activities pursued at a number of different levels simultaneously. First, a concerted effort must be made to change the perceptions and approaches of Middle East states so that they cease adopting security policies that diminish the security of their neighbors. For this purpose, greater awareness must be developed by the region's states regarding the "security dilemma"—that their neighbors' diminished security rarely translates to gains in their own well-being. Insecure neighbors take steps to address their weaknesses and these steps may diminish regional security. Therefore, if possible, the region's states should pursue policies aimed at enhancing their security without diminishing their neighbors' self-confidence.

Second, every possible effort must be made to enhance the ACRS process. The web of confidence- and security-building measures negotiated in the framework of these talks—including the establishment of a Regional Security Center—should be implemented without delay. The smooth functioning of these measures over time will gradually create an infrastructure of mutual trust that is essential for the eventual negotiations and implementation of more significant arms reduction measures. At the same time initial discussions regarding the conditions and modalities for implementing structural arms control measures should be woven into the ACRS talks. This should be done carefully and in a balanced fashion, without singling out any particular type of weapon.

Third, channels of track-II discussions must be expanded to complement the ACRS process. These channels provide important opportunities for informal exchanges, allowing the parties to air their perceptions and concerns in an uncommitted fashion. Within the framework of these talks, options for overcoming obstacles and resolving deadlocks can be examined in a less charged atmosphere than that sometimes characterizing bilateral and multilateral track-I negotiations.

Fourth, a Middle East Cooperative Security Framework (MECSF) should be established. This framework would gradually replace the ACRS process. It would enjoy a high profile, thus illustrating that the region's states have moved from a narrow pursuit of national security to a serious effort to enhance regional security. It would be managed by the region's states, which would demonstrate that the Middle East peace process has matured. Also, it would combat mythmaking and engage in conflict resolution in order to diminish the danger that the peace process might be reversed.

Finally, the United States must remain engaged in the Middle East and must continue to pursue the array of its present policies in the region. By facilitating the peaceful resolution of disputes, by helping deter aggression and extremism, by encouraging economic development, democratization, and human rights, and by strengthening moderate governments in the region, the United States should continue to enhance the region's security.

Taken together, these five measures comprise an architecture for security building in the Middle East. If considered carefully and implemented wisely, these measures can significantly enhance the region's stability. Pursuing these measures would present the region's leaders with a difficult challenge requiring much sophistication and finesse. If they accept the challenge, the reward may be a new, more secure Middle East.