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Final

Nuclear questions in the Middle East

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I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this conference and I shall try to contribute some thoughts on the problem of nuclear weapons in the Middle East.

Some six months ago the international Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (WMDC) that I chaired presented a unanimous report urging governments to wake up from what Kofi Annan has called their current “sleepwalking” and revive arms control and disarmament. My comments today are made partly against the background of this report. It is available to participants in hard copy and on the net (www.wmdcommission.org)

Let me start by saying that 40 years after the conclusion of the Non Proliferation Treaty (1968) and more than 15 years after the end of the Cold War the nuclear weapon states should – as Kofi Annan urges – take the lead in phasing out nuclear weapons rather than developing new weapons or means of delivery. It is not a recipe for success to preach to the rest of the world that it must stay away from the very weapons, which they claim are indispensable for themselves.

Perhaps it might be a little less difficult to persuade **Iran** to suspend a program for the enrichment of uranium and accept far-reaching verification, if all nuclear weapon states negotiating with Iran were to be ready at least to accept a verified stop on the production of enriched uranium and plutonium for weapons.

Apart from such climate changing measures, which means of persuasion are available to prevent further proliferation? In all **cases economic incentives** may be helpful. **The DPRK** is offered heavy oil and assistance for development. **Iran** is offered investments and support to become a member of the WTO. There seems also to be relatively broad support for disincentives through the withholding of positive measures or through the imposition of various economic sanctions, provided that they do not – like the boarding of ships for export controls – risk leading to armed clashes.

The WMDC, which I chaired, stressed the need in all cases to understand the factors which may induce a state to acquire wmd and to seek to remove the incentives. Two factors were identified as particularly common and relevant

- **Perceived security needs; and**
- **Demands for recognition (status)**

Quests for **recognition and status** may be important to governments that, for various reasons, have been isolated and ostracized. **Libya, the DPRK and Iran** may be examples. **Libya** divested itself of its nuclear program after negotiations leading to enhanced official recognition and the lifting of UN sanctions. In the case of the **DPRK** President Carter's visit to President Kim Il Sung in 1994 opened the way for agreement and a current offer of a **normalization of relations with the US and Japan** sends a signal that a nuclear deal would end the DPRK' isolation.

In the case of **Iran** diplomatic relations exist with all the negotiating parties, except the US. Although potentially it could carry great weight, the US has not, to my knowledge, made any offer of a normalization of relations a part of a deal with **Iran**.

Now let me turn to **the issue of perceived security**. What will convince a state that its security will be better served by a credible renunciation of the nuclear weapons option than by the retention or use of that option?

One approach by the current US administration has been – both in the case of the DPRK and Iran -- to convey the message that moving toward nuclear weapons will **not bring** but **will jeopardize security** – that it will result in increased isolation and vulnerability and may trigger preventive counterproliferation action and/or Security Council intervention.

Such threats -- including messages that “all options are on the table” have several **difficulties**. **One** is that recipients, contrary to the aim of the messages, may seek to move **faster to nuclear weapons** in the belief that this will help to deter counterproliferation. **Another** difficulty lies in the field of **legality and legitimacy**. A state’s apparent – or real – moving toward nuclear weapon capability does not constitute an “**armed attack**” that justifies the use of armed force in self defense without Security Council authorization. Ignoring this Charter restriction on the use of armed force may have negative effects, as we have seen in the case of the war launched on Iraq.

The Security Council, although entitled under the Charter to authorize military action, not only against “**armed attacks**” but also when it decides that there is a ‘**threat to the peace**’, seems unlikely to go that far to eradicate alleged or apparent wmd programs that are not actively used as threats.

Hence my conclusion that especially after the horrendous consequences of military action in Iraq, **both the Council and member states** are likely to **limit their actions regarding wmd in the Middle East to measures of political, diplomatic and economic kinds**.

If military action is ruled out can the opposite – **positive guarantees** about **security** – be persuasive as an incentive to stop or forego nuclear programs? In the case of the DPRK the US administration seems to think so. As a part of a deal and perhaps to meet the DPRK’s stated concern about the ‘hostile attitude of the US’ guarantees against attack from the outside appear to be offered.

Is the question of security of relevance to Iranian decisions on the nuclear issue? At the present time **Iran** can hardly worry about Iraq or other neighbouring states. However, it might perceive the US military presence in the region and US policies of regime change and preventive counter-proliferation as a current threat. Although security guarantees have not been on the table as they are in the case of the DPRK it is hard to believe that the issue of security could be irrelevant to Iran.

The security issue is obviously of central importance to all states in the region. It is not very meaningful to search for more evidence to verify the claim that Iran’s enrichment program **aims** only to produce nuclear power

fuel. Aims can change over time and the cold fact remains that the physical existence of an industrial scale enrichment plant in Iran would dangerously increase tension in a region, which is in dire need of lower tension.

Practically all would want to see a negotiated agreement under which Iran suspended the program of enrichment and was ensured inter alia of support for its program to use nuclear power. However, **currently, Iran is rejecting** the suspension that is urged. There is a risk of escalation of the controversy and fears of long term domino effects. Can any element relating to security be introduced?

A zone free of nuclear and other wmd in the Middle East inspired mainly by security considerations, was first proposed by Egypt and Iran in 1974 and has been a universally supported since then. It may well be an indispensable part of a broader peace settlement but is **not realistic** in the present political and security climate.

Arrangements to limit the number of enrichment and reprocessing plants in **particularly sensitive areas** might be another matter. In the denuclearization declaration of 1992 the two Korean states agreed between themselves that neither would have enrichment or reprocessing plants on their territory and this feature is expected to be confirmed in any new nuclear arrangement for the peninsula.

Could the Korean pattern be followed by the states in the Middle East, which form another sensitive region? In the past year several states in the region have voiced interest in developing nuclear power and there have been speculations that in the wake of such developments sensitive nuclear fuel cycle facilities might also be contemplated. This would surely increase tension. Perhaps an agreement should be reached without delay under which all states in the region would forego any enrichment of uranium and reprocessing of plutonium for a prolonged period of time and be guaranteed fuel cycle services were arranged outside the region?

Such an agreement would not touch existing quantities of enriched uranium or plutonium whether in laboratories, stores or Israeli weapons. However, if such an agreement were subject to effective international inspection it could assure all that no further quantities of HEU or Pu were added anywhere in the region and it might constitute step on the long and difficult road to the zone free of wmd.

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