

# 1. Introduction

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Notwithstanding recent peace talks among the countries of the Middle East, foreign policy analysts—inside and outside the U.S. government—continue to be concerned about the possible outbreak of hostilities in this volatile region. Part of this concern is fueled by the perception that the nations of this region have historically pursued their security interests by expanding and modernizing their military forces and periodically using them to achieve their policy ends. This concern is further exacerbated by the fact that the nations of the Middle East have historically exhibited little interest in arms control or reaching political compromises that mutually constrain military capabilities.

Yet, the potential causes of instability in the Middle East are growing. Although the eight-year Iran-Iraq War and the Persian Gulf War are now over, hostile feelings remain and a number of countries in the region are perceptibly fearful about their future security. Arab-Israeli tensions remain in the absence of tangible progress toward a diplomatic settlement of the central issues in dispute. At the same time, sophisticated new conventional arms are being transferred into the region. By the middle of 1992, the United States alone had agreed to transfer to the region more than \$20 billion of advanced conventional arms since the end of the Persian Gulf War. And in the past few years a number of countries in the region have reportedly acquired surface-to-surface missiles, chemical weapons, and biological weapons, and are rapidly increasing their ability to

produce these weapons indigenously and to deploy them clandestinely.

Unchecked, these developments are likely to intensify in coming years as traditional as well as new Third World arms suppliers (such as Argentina, Brazil, and India) expand their arms-exporting capabilities and as more Middle Eastern countries seek to modernize their conventional and unconventional weapons arsenals. A number of these developments—such as the coupling of chemical weapons and ballistic missile arsenals in the region and the possible “brain drain” of Russian scientists to the Middle East—have potentially ominous implications for Middle Eastern states as well as U.S. security interests there. Although no causal relationship between inventories of arms and the likelihood of war exists, there is little question but that many of these developments will heighten tensions and ensure that any future conflict in the Middle East will be devastating.

This project was initiated in the belief that with the end of the Cold War—and subsequently the Persian Gulf War—it was a propitious time to take a fresh look at the possibilities for arms control in the Middle East. For this project, arms control was broadly conceived as “any measure that reduces the likelihood of war as an instrument of policy or that limits the destructiveness and duration of war should it break out.”<sup>1</sup> The underlying premise of the project was that various postwar East-West arms control efforts provide a number of lessons—some positive and some negative—for the possible role of arms control in the Middle East and that these lessons are important to identify and evaluate for their future relevance to the Middle East in particular and the Third World in general.

Accordingly, several papers were commissioned to look at different possible approaches to arms control in the Middle East. For each paper, one coauthor was chosen for his or her detailed knowledge of a particular arms control approach that was developed in an East-West context. The other coauthor was

chosen because of extensive experience in the Middle East region.

Each chapter in this volume concludes, in its own way, that the current possibilities for arms control in the Middle East are limited. Implicit in each chapter is the understanding that in the absence of substantial movement in the peace process, there are serious limitations on what is likely to be achieved in the area of arms control. Although the ongoing peace talks have been important for bringing Israelis and Arabs together for face-to-face meetings, these talks have not achieved (at least by spring 1992) what the Bush administration had hoped for—a substantive breakthrough based on a transformation in the attitudes of the countries in the region. Nevertheless, all the chapters argue that there are some interesting near-term possibilities for arms control in the Middle East, particularly concerning confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs), and that these efforts should be explored in parallel with the peace process and not be held hostage to achieving substantial progress in the formal peace negotiations.

In an article published in 1987, Richard Darilek of the RAND Corporation and a contributor to this volume, drew an important distinction between structural and operational arms control.<sup>2</sup> Darilek argued that two different approaches to arms control were pursued in East-West arms control efforts during the 1970s and 1980s. One effort, which he termed the “structural” approach, centered around Vienna. There, NATO and Warsaw Pact countries engaged in formal arms control negotiations—first the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) Talks and later the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) negotiations. These talks to scale down the two blocs’ manpower and military equipment ultimately produced agreement to make major reductions in NATO and Warsaw Pact forces. A second arms control effort was carried out in the context of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). These talks focused on CSBMs rather than on

reducing the size of the forces of the participating NATO, Warsaw Pact, and neutral countries, and, as such, were characterized by Darilek as "operational" arms control.

Beginning with the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the operational approach led to the 1986 "Document of the Stockholm Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures," wherein CSBMs were defined as "arrangements designed to enhance assurance of mind and belief in the trustworthiness of states and the facts they create."<sup>3</sup> The Stockholm Document and the follow-on 1990 Vienna Document laid out various agreed-upon procedures governing NATO and Warsaw Pact countries' military activities in Europe—the exchange of certain information, the provision of advance notifications of exercises or concentrations of troops in excess of various thresholds, the invitation of observers to such activities, and the establishment of procedures for inspections of questionable activities, among other things.

Although these measures are likely to be difficult to achieve in the Middle East in the near term (it was eleven years from the signing of the Helsinki Final Act to the conclusion of the Stockholm Document), CSBMs are likely, for the foreseeable future, to have more relevance and utility in the Middle East than structural arms control efforts. As Darilek and Kemp observe in their chapter on CSBMs in the Middle East, arms control efforts in this region need to start with preliminary or "precursor" CSBMs, not structural arms control efforts or even sophisticated Stockholm-type CSBMs, to begin to bridge centuries of hostilities and the consequent lack of communication among the countries of the Middle East. Focusing on the kinds of information exchange measures agreed to early in the East-West context, Darilek and Kemp recommend for the Middle East such precursor CSBMs as holding informal seminars about military doctrine and setting up communications hot lines. Such measures, by increasing transparency and mutual understanding, could help reduce the risk of war. Obversely, in the

absence of any precursor CSBMs, various military activities in the Middle East could be miscalculated and serve as a catalyst to inadvertent war, that is, a war that neither side wanted nor expected at the outset of a crisis.

Each of the other chapters in this volume reaches the same conclusion as Darilek and Kemp: arms control in the Middle East should begin with modest CSBMs, building on past experiences in the region and taking into account what is feasible in political terms. Krepon and Constable argue in their chapter, for example, that the successful 1974 Israeli-Syrian disengagement agreement on the Golan Heights and the 1979 Sinai demilitarization accord between Israel and Egypt suggest that aerial inspections might be used for future confidence building among the parties of the Middle East. Carus and Nolan argue that any missile restraint efforts in the Middle East should focus initially on such CSBMs as information and intelligence exchanges, prior notification of missile tests, and limited visits to defense production and space launch facilities. Finally, Flowerree and Roberts argue that chemical weapons arms control efforts in the Middle East could most usefully be pursued in the near term by focusing on the kinds of transparency measures that gained broad support in the international negotiations held in Geneva to conclude the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

In all the chapters, the common assumption is that formal structural East-West arms control negotiating approaches, such as the MBFR, strategic arms limitation talks, and strategic arms reduction talks, are not likely to bear fruit any time soon in the Middle East. Initial efforts involving regional participants, if they are to be successful, need to begin with relatively noncontroversial measures to build confidence and improve communications among the parties of the region. Such measures—precursor CSBMs—are likely to hold the greatest chance for success if they are introduced in a step-by-step manner and build on previous successful efforts in the region.

For these types of precursor CSBMs to succeed, at least two basic preconditions are required: the measures must not directly undermine the security of the regional parties and they must be acceptable to all participating states. These two preconditions can be met, it is argued in this volume, if the CSBMs are not too ambitious to begin with and are formulated in a manner that takes into account the historical experiences and interests of the countries in the region. Although the lack of diplomatic recognition between Israel and all but one of its Arab neighbors constitutes a potentially serious roadblock to far-reaching CSBMs, it need not bar new steps. Some precursor CSBMs, however, may have to be tacit rather than formal and carried out through the good offices of third parties.

This step-by-step approach was how arms control was, in fact, effectively pursued by the United States and the Soviet Union during most of the postwar era when serious political differences divided the two nuclear superpowers. In this light, the pursuit of arms control in the Middle East today can most usefully be compared with the pursuit of arms control between the superpowers during the 1960s, not the 1990s. Indeed, arms control typically makes the most sense between adversaries who, despite all their antagonisms, share certain common interests. Even the most hostile states can find common ground, for example, in the types of CSBMs that help prevent accidental wars and unintended escalation.

Taken together, the collaborative chapters that follow should be seen as part of a larger process to develop the intellectual infrastructure for arms control in the Middle East. These ideas may not be appropriate for immediate negotiation and implementation, but they can be "stockpiled" for future application in the region. If the suitability of a particular approach to a problem appears highly limited in 1992, we should not forget that even the idea of holding Middle East peace talks among the regions' participants was extremely unlikely before the Persian Gulf War. It is also worth recalling that the body of literature

on East-West arms control that was developed during the 1960s and 1970s was not translated into policy until many years later.

In short, this volume was put together with the understanding that the current applicability of arms control in the Middle East would likely be limited and, in any case, arms control could not solve the long-standing rivalries and differences among the nations of the region. The key issues in dispute ultimately must be resolved through negotiation, and failure to progress in the peace process will inevitably limit arms control in the region. Nevertheless, the time is ripe to begin developing a body of analytical literature on the pros and cons of particular approaches to arms control in the Middle East, utilizing the skills and experience of experts in Middle Eastern affairs as well as practitioners and scholars of East-West arms control efforts. Progress on the Middle East arms control front may not go very far or very fast for lack of political will at this time but it is implicit in this volume that progress should not be held back by a lack of useful arms control ideas, especially ideas aimed at building confidence and reducing tensions in the region.

If we set modest goals for initial Middle East arms control efforts, if we try to pursue these efforts on a step-by-step basis, if we truly put America's post-Persian Gulf War prestige behind initial acceptance of precursor CSBMs among the countries of the Middle East, if we try to take into account the security concerns of all the different nations of the region, and if we make this effort a consistently high-priority item on our foreign policy agenda, the United States can succeed in helping to build confidence and promote arms control in the region. Indeed, under these circumstances, a considerably wider range of policy instruments to promote peace in the Middle East is likely to be available than if international efforts concentrate on either formal peace negotiations or structural efforts to reduce the size of the arsenals in the region.

