

Confidence-Building Measures in the Middle East: Developments in the Arab–Israeli Peace Process, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Persian Gulf

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Despite the common perception that the Middle East is rife with instability and tension, confidence-building measures (CBMs) can and do work in the region. The measures in place have evolved over time from conflict-avoidance arrangements linked to post-war truces and disengagement agreements, incorporating force deployment limitations and cooperative aerial monitoring, to more ambitious confidence-building measures and peace accords.¹ This essay will survey recent CBM developments in the region, focusing particularly on the arms control and regional security (ACRS) working group established by the Madrid peace process, as well as on trends toward confidence-building within subregions of the Middle East.

The Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group

Emerging after the expulsion of Iraqi troops from Kuwait, the Madrid peace process presented a new opportunity for confidence-building in the region. Actively nurtured by the shuttle diplomacy of then-US secretary of state James Baker and sustained by US secretary of state Warren Christopher and US special envoy Dennis Ross, the Madrid process was designed to proceed on two tracks, one bilateral, the other multilateral. The bilateral track focuses on forging peace between Israel and each of her Arab neighbors, including, after some delay, the Palestinians. The multilateral track seeks to build broader regional cooperation and security by concentrating efforts in five functional working groups, including one on ACRS

¹For a review of longer-standing conflict-avoidance arrangements in the Middle East stemming from the 1967 and 1973 wars, please see, Jill R. Junnola, "Conflict Avoidance and Confidence-building in the Middle East," in *Regional Confidence-building in 1995: South Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America*, Jill R. Junnola and Michael Krepon, eds. (Washington, D.C.: The Henry L. Stimson Center, December 1995). Sections of this essay are drawn from this earlier publication.

designed to apply confidence-building measures in the region.² Progress on the multilateral track is intended to follow, rather than lead, bilateral negotiations.

The jury is still out on the success and fate of the ACRS working group.³ Though the talks broke down in early 1995, they still merit attention as the first sustained multilateral effort to establish a cooperative security regime in the region, a noteworthy achievement. This section of the essay will first review the progress achieved by the working group between 1992 and 1995, explain why the talks broke down, and examine how various Track Two efforts in the region have attempted to compensate for the this.

Early Stages

Discussions in the ACRS working group were intended to complement, but not substitute for, bilateral talks, and to follow, rather than lead, bilateral security negotiations.

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The first ACRS meetings were conducted seminar style, as tutorial sessions on CBMs, with the bulk of the presentations coming from the extra-regional parties who offered parallels from the European experience. Once the parties became familiar with the range of CBMs and arms control arrangements available to them, the ACRS talks were structured into four working groups to help address specific threat perceptions and to provide the appropriate fora for discussion of the application of CBMs to specific concerns. Each working group was

assigned a mentor: Turkey served as mentor for “Exchange of Military Information and Pre-Notification of Certain Military Activities;” Canada for “Search and Rescue” and “Incidents at Sea;” and the Netherlands for establishing a regional communications center. The United

² Other working groups focus on economic cooperation, refugees, water, and the environment. For an overall account of progress made and topics discussed in all five working groups, see Joel Peters, *Pathways to Peace: The Multilateral Arab-Israeli Peace Talks* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996). States participating in the ACRS working group include: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians; Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates; Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. Syria and Lebanon were invited but chose not to participate. Iran, Iraq, and Libya were not invited.

³ For two excellent reviews of the ACRS working group that go into further detail, please see Bruce Jentleson, “The Middle East Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Talks: Progress, Problems, and Prospects,” Policy Paper no. 26 (San Diego, Calif.: Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California at San Diego, September 1996); and Peter Jones, “Arms Control in the Middle East: Some Reflections on ACRS,” *Security Dialogue* 28, no. 1 (March 1997): 57–70.

States and Russia sponsored discussions on declaratory CBMs and a host of conceptual issues related to security.

For several reasons, the working groups were restructured in late 1993. First, it was felt that the workload and travel burden brought on by the combination of plenary meetings and multiple intercessional workshops for each working group would overwhelm the smaller delegations to the process.⁴ Thus, the first three working groups were collected in an “Operational Basket” to focus on communications, information exchanges, and maritime measures. The other working group was redefined as a “Conceptual Basket” to concentrate on clarifying long-term objectives (including the region’s nuclear status), facilitating declaratory measures on verification, establishing a conflict prevention center, and defining the region geographically for purposes of arms control.

Second, tensions had already emerged between Egypt and Israel on the nuclear front. Egyptian officials may have been concerned about Israeli negotiating tactics, namely “the alleged propensity of the Israelis to argue that large and complex issues should be broken down into their constituent parts, only then to break the issue down into so many small parts (and debate them indefinitely) that the fundamental question is never dealt with.”⁵ Whether this was Egypt’s perception of Israeli negotiating tactics or not, Egypt supported the restructuring, as it regrouped issues into larger components and enabled Egypt to link work in the Operational Basket to progress in resolving what Cairo viewed as the core, fundamental issues in the Conceptual Basket. The multi-basket approach, whereby substantive issues are considered in separate groupings, is borrowed from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). This provided flexibility in the CSCE (now the OSCE, or Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), and it was hoped that the structure would provide similar support for the ACRS process.

Early ACRS sessions sought to build knowledge of CBMs among regional participants. As parties came to articulate their concerns, the nuclear asymmetry of the region proved to be a focal point, and a wide gap between Israeli and Egyptian priorities on arms control emerged. Israel proposed that the first steps toward arms control consist of transparency CBMs, such as establishing a communications hotline, while Egypt suggested that all parties in the region first sign existing nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons treaties and allow international inspections. Israel maintained that CBMs were a prerequisite to any steps toward denuclearization. Thereafter, Egypt and Israel remained at loggerheads in the ACRS talks about how best to initiate a process of confidence-building in the region, while Egypt’s concern grew that no real arms control measures would emerge from the ACRS process.

⁴Jones, “Arms Control in the Middle East,” 61.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

A draft “Declaration of Principles and Statement of Intent on Arms Control and Regional Security” (alternatively known as the ACRS “Vision Paper” or DOP), modeled on the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, was crafted when the ACRS Conceptual Basket met in Cairo in February 1994. This document notes the need for states in the region to build mutual confidence, and to support a nuclear weapons-free zone in the region, as well as commit to resolve conflicts peacefully and to make progress in arms reductions. The DOP also set out step-by-step guidelines for future ACRS meetings, including its goals and the methods by which to reach them.⁶ This document, if finalized, would be the first multilateral Arab–Israeli agreement establishing guidelines for inter-state relations in the Middle East. The draft text of this statement was further discussed at subsequent plenaries in 1994, but only as an object of contention. At the Doha plenary in May 1994, Saudi Arabia insisted that the DOP be downgraded to that of an “ACRS Declaration.” At the next plenary in Tunisia in December 1994, a dispute between Israel and Egypt over acceptable language regarding the NPT prevented its acceptance, and the “ACRS Declaration” was further reduced to a “Statement on Arms Control and Regional Security.”⁷

Efforts were also made at the Conceptual Basket meeting in February 1994 to begin the task of defining the region geographically for purposes of arms control—no easy task—by commissioning papers on the subject from participants. This effort was complicated by the geography and regional dynamics of the Middle East.⁸ If, for example, Turkey were considered to lay outside the ‘Middle East,’ Syria would find it difficult to accede to any regional agreement that places demands on Syrian forces, thus increasing Syria’s vulnerability vis-à-vis Turkey. More specifically in the ACRS context, Israel extends its definition of the region to include Iran, which is not an ACRS participant. In presenting its paper delineating the Middle East region for purposes of arms control and regional security at the Conceptual Basket meeting in October 1994, Israel argued that “Iran is a possible future nuclear threat to Israel and should thus be included in any definition of the region for nuclear arms control purposes.”⁹ By extension, Israel claimed, nuclear issues could not be discussed in ACRS until Iran was integrated into a regional regime. Israel instead proposed that the region be split into

⁶ Jentleson, “Middle East Arms Control,” 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

⁸ The region’s “strategic interdependence” is such that “while certain security problems can be addressed in isolation and within a given geopolitical environment, inevitably they have an overarching dynamism which hinders finding solutions to the security dilemmas of states at the sub-regional level.” See Anoushiravan Ehteshami, “Security Structures in the Middle East,” in *The Middle East in the New World Order*, ed. Haifaa Jawad (London: Macmillan, 1994; and New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 72.

⁹ Jones, “Arms Control in the Middle East,” 64.

three zones to accommodate the different threats posed by the type of weapons within those zones—conventional, biological, chemical, or nuclear.¹⁰

Efforts to define regional security concerns were bolstered by additional papers commissioned at the plenary meeting in Qatar in May 1994. The ACRS co-sponsors agreed to take the lead in soliciting papers from regional parties that detail their long-term objectives; future ACRS Conceptual Basket workshops were to be devoted to the co-sponsors' analyses of these long-term objectives to help clarify the Middle East's security environment.

Verification issues in ACRS reached the preliminary 'show and tell' stages. In October 1994, several parties visited a nuclear power plant in Europe, where verification techniques were demonstrated and experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and European Atomic (EURATOM) explained how regional verification measures can complement international efforts. ACRS participants also examined the verification mechanisms of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) by visiting analysis laboratories to be associated with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).¹¹

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Areas of Progress

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Communications network. At the May 1994 meeting in Doha, participants agreed to establish a regional communications network, linked temporarily to the OSCE network at the Hague. Egypt offered to host the permanent regional site, and end-user stations have been installed by Egypt and Israel. Jordan, Qatar, and the Palestinian Authority also plan to install end-user stations.

¹⁰ For further details on the Israeli proposal, see Jones, "Arms Control in the Middle East," 64.

¹¹ Jones, "Arms Control in the Middle East," 65.

Regional security center. At the May 1994 meeting there was also broad support for continued discussion of a regional conflict prevention center and its possible connection to a regional communications network. At a later meeting in Jordan in November 1994, the parties agreed on the need to establish a conflict prevention center, as well as on the range of functions it should undertake. During subsequent meetings, parties decided that the main regional security center would be established in Amman, Jordan, with subregional security centers based in Tunis and Doha, Qatar. Parties met again in Amman in September 1995 to establish a mandate for the center, just prior to the cessation of ACRS.

Maritime confidence-building.¹² There has been general progress and consensus on maritime CBMs, reflected in progress toward agreements on search and rescue (SAR) operations and a prevention of incidents at sea (INCSEA) agreement. An INCSEA text and a framework for a SAR text were agreed at the November session in Jordan and further developed at the December plenary in Tunis. The INCSEA text was fully completed in Antalya in March 1995, and was scheduled to be adopted at the next ACRS plenary session before the talks went into abeyance. The SAR text lists a number of measures parties need to undertake, but again, formal adoption and implementation awaits the resumption of the working group.

Prenotification. In December 1994, ACRS participants agreed to notify each other in advance of plans to move more than 4,000 troops or 110 tanks. This landmark transparency measure was the result of a long-term process of discussion and negotiation. In the Spring of 1994, parties had discussed possible threshold numbers for military personnel, tanks, and brigades/regiments. Participants also agreed (in March 1994) that a realistic starting point would be to exchange numbers of military personnel, information on unclassified military publications, organizational charts of military establishments, the structure of defense forces and the Ministry of Defense, and curriculum vitae of senior military personnel—classic transparency and communication CBMs. More contentious areas to be addressed in the future include the exchange of information on military stockpiles and storage, the new acquisition of military equipment, the location of certain military forces, levels of military budgets, and overall military holdings.¹³

The Breakdown

Egypt–Israel nuclear stand-off. Deep divisions between Egypt and Israel lie at the

¹² For further detail on ACRS maritime confidence-building, please see Peter Jones, “Maritime Confidence-building in the Middle East,” in *Confidence-building in Regions of Tension*, ed. Jill R. Junnola (Washington, D.C.: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 1996), 57–73.

¹³ Suha Umar, “Middle East Peace Process: The Multilateral Dimension,” *Malta Review of Foreign Affairs* (June 1994): 16.

core of the breakdown of ACRS and entails a number of disagreements.¹⁴ First, the two countries disagree on the best approach to the confidence-building process. Egypt insists on taking initial confidence-building steps in the nuclear field, and has pressured Israel to acknowledge, open up, and roll back its nuclear program and to accede to the NPT. Israel prefers instead to initiate confidence-building on a more basic level, beginning with transparency measures in the conventional field, and to turn to the nuclear field last, after some level of confidence and a trend toward peace has been established among parties. This dispute was elevated considerably when Egypt initially linked its vote to renew the NPT indefinitely at the April 1995 extension conference to concessions from Israel. In the end, however, Egypt backed down and the NPT was renewed indefinitely. Nothing has resulted from a reported December 1995 agreement between Egypt and Israel to set aside discussion on Israel's nuclear program, thereby paving the way for further progress in the multilateral talks.¹⁵

Second, Egypt and Israel differ in their requirements for a future nuclear weapons-free zone in the region. Israel does not have confidence in IAEA safeguards provided under the NPT and insists upon a tight and complementary regional verification regime, whereas Egypt maintains that the existing global regime is sufficient. The two states are also at odds with the type of weaponry to be prohibited in a weapons-free zone; Egypt would have the weapons-free zone focus on nuclear weapons, while Israel would extend it to include chemical and biological weapons.¹⁶ Third, the two states disagree on a geographic definition of the region for purposes of arms control. Egypt claimed that a definition of the Middle East should begin with those states participating in ACRS, arguing that the "core" area (Israel and her neighbors) was the zone of most pressing concern" and that arms control efforts should begin there. Israel, with an eye on Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program, argued that "any definition of the region for arms control purposes must include all those states which might upset an arms control arrangement if left outside it."¹⁷

¹⁴ Jentleson, "Middle East Arms Control," 16.

¹⁵ According to then-Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres, Egypt agreed to withdraw its demands for Israeli de-nuclearization until a comprehensive peace treaty, to include Syria and Lebanon, is signed in the region. In exchange, Israel agreed to sign a nuclear-free accord one year after reaching such a comprehensive peace. At the time, however, the Egyptian Embassy in Washington declined to confirm or deny that agreement had been reached. See "Israel, Egypt Agree on Nuclear Arms Plan," *Defense News*, 11–17 December 1995, 2.

¹⁶ Jentleson, "Middle East Arms Control," 16.

¹⁷ Jones, "Arms Control in the Middle East," 64.

Old dynamics threatened. It is widely conceded, however, that the stand-off between Egypt and Israel is caused by political, not security, factors.¹⁸ As stated by Bruce Jentleson in his excellent study of the ACRS talks, “It is extremely difficult to explain the rigidity and confrontational quality of the Egyptian position on the nuclear issue strictly in security terms. A genuine nuclear threat from Israel hardly ranks very high in the realm of immediate security threats that Egypt faces.”¹⁹ Indeed, it would be difficult to explain the continued commercial dealings of Israel and Egypt—such as a joint refinery, plans to integrate power grids, and plans (albeit stalled) to construct a pipeline to transport gas from Egypt to Israel—in the context of a nuclear threat posed by Israel.

Politically, the Middle East has experienced momentous changes since the early 1990s. As new bonds have been forged among states, the old dynamics of regional hegemony have been threatened. Egypt, the self-appointed leader of the Arab world, found itself increasingly

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marginalized as other Arab states and subregions began to deal directly with Israel, both through the ACRS talks and bilateral negotiations, as well as through commercial dealings. As in the CSCE process, the regularly scheduled meetings and exchanges among states party to ACRS allowed the voices of smaller states to be heard; not burdened with the responsibility of representing the ‘Arab world,’ these states are less prone to hardline positions and have helped forge new openings in relations with Israel.²⁰ Ironically, this potentially positive

¹⁸ According to one author, “The alternative to such bold action [on Egypt’s part] could mean the loss of Egypt’s primary position. The country has already faced setbacks—the economic regional conferences in Casablanca, in Amman, the burgeoning links between the Gulf countries and Israel without Egypt being ‘in the loop,’ the new economic and political reality of Jordanian–Israeli relations. . . .” See David Kimche, “The Arab–Israeli Peace Process,” *Security Dialogue* 27, no. 2 (June 1996): 147.

¹⁹Jentleson, “Middle East Arms Control,” 16.

²⁰ Several of the Maghreb states viewed participation in the multilaterals as a stepping stone for opening diplomatic ties with Israel. Morocco opened low-level diplomatic relations with Israel in September 1994, and Tunisia followed suit in October 1994. These steps were followed by the opening of Israeli diplomatic missions in both countries in the spring of 1996. Among the Gulf states, Qatar, as host of the May ACRS site, together with Oman

consequence of the ACRS process seems instead to have had a negative impact. These new voices were perceived by Egypt as diminishing its leadership role. To a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia reacted the same way, perhaps indirectly contributing to the breakdown of the process.

The Maghreb states, for example, are most concerned with economic development and “often find more in common with Israel than with the ‘core’ Arab states like Egypt and Syria.”²¹ Similarly, some of the smaller Gulf states have less to fear from Israel than from their neighbors, and have thus chosen to pursue security pacts with the West, “even if they undermine Arab unity and threaten domestic resistance to their regimes.”²² Moreover, in sharp contrast to Egypt’s stated position on broaching the region’s nuclear status, Jordan’s 1994 peace treaty with Israel agreed to the objective of “a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction” that the two states would pursue not directly and immediately but “in the context of achieving a just, secure, comprehensive, and lasting peace and reconciliation.”²³ This independent Jordanian position contributed to Egypt’s decision to block the sixth ACRS plenary, which was to be held in Amman.²⁴ Similarly, Egypt found itself increasingly on the fringes of the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations. Rallying the Arab world to protest Israel’s nuclear program was seen as an easy way to shore up Egypt’s prestige, as well as to deflect domestic attentions from Egypt’s more pressing problems at home.

For similar reasons, Saudi Arabia also tried to slow down ACRS. First, Riyadh felt that its neighboring Gulf states, particularly Qatar, the host of the 1994 ACRS plenary, were diminishing Saudi Arabia’s leadership position on the Arabian peninsula. Second, already defensive about its western security arrangements, Riyadh may have been concerned that anything beyond minimal cooperation with Israel would further fuel domestic opposition to the ruling family. Saudi Arabia was also under pressure from non-participant Syria to hold things up, and worried about language (modeled on the Helsinki Final Act) concerned with human rights in the DOP.²⁵

have been particularly vocal and strong proponents of pursuing economic and diplomatic relations with Israel. On the former, see Dalia Dassa Kaye, “Madrid’s Forgotten Forum: The Middle East Multilaterals,” *Washington Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 180.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 181

²² *Ibid.* 181.

²³ Jentleson, “Middle East Arms Control,” 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

Challenges to ACRS

Balancing strategic asymmetries in region. The traditional depiction of Israel's Arab neighbors as universally hostile has tended to skew Israel's strategic doctrine, creating one that is "rooted in the quest for military superiority over any combination of Arab states that may be arrayed against Tel Aviv."²⁶ Indeed, Israel views its nuclear capability as a deterrent to the wide array of conventional, biological, and chemical weapon threats posed by Arab states.²⁷ For their part, Arab states help to perpetuate skewed perceptions of strategic reality in the region by continuing to foster the false front of Arab brotherhood. In reality, an organized Arab alliance against Israel does not now exist and has been extremely difficult to orchestrate in the past. Any large Arab 'coalition' against Israel would be rife with a number of bilateral, inter-Arab rivalries. For constructive measures toward confidence-building to begin, particularly on the nuclear front, it must be conceded that Israeli security concerns based on a threat posed by an 'Arab alliance' are exaggerated.²⁸

The strategic asymmetry of the region thus remains a key challenge to multilateral confidence-building in the Middle East, though it should not preclude a workable solution. In surveying global applications of CBMs, two scholars have found that "relations between the parties to the CSBMs (confidence and security building measures) have been typically characterized by critical asymmetries and structural imbalances."²⁹ In the early stages of ACRS, parties were able to work around the contentious nuclear issue to apply CBMs in other fields, such as communication and transparency. Though it was hoped that over time this would build trust, alleviate tension, and help narrow the gap between Israeli and Egyptian positions on how best to approach nuclear confidence-building, this has not happened.

²⁶ Yahya Sadowski, *Scuds or Butter? The Political Economy of Arms Control in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993), 6.

²⁷ According to one analyst, ". . . [F]or Egypt and the other Arab states, the Israeli nuclear capability is perceived not as a deterrent but a compellant. It is considered a destabilizing factor in the Middle East and a call for continuing the race in mass destructive weapons." Abdel Monem Said Aly, "Arab Perspective on Arms Control," in *The Arab-Israeli Search for Peace*, Steven Spiegel, ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 153.

²⁸ Some Israeli analysts have begun to reassess Israeli security concerns given recent changes in the international environment that render earlier concerns exaggerated. For an excellent analysis of regional and international trends and potential forthcoming changes in Israeli strategic doctrine, see Shai Feldman, "Israel's Changing Environment: Implications for Arms Control," in *Confidence-building and Verification: Prospects in the Middle East*, Shai Feldman, ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press for the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1994), 195–205. See also Steven L. Spiegel and David J. Pervin, eds., *Practical Peacemaking in the Middle East, Volume I: Arms Control and Regional Security* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995).

²⁹ Ariel Levite and Emily Landau, "Confidence and Security Building Measures in the Middle East," *Journal of Strategic Studies* (April 1997): 32.

Engaging non-participants. A crucial long-term challenge on the multilateral level is engaging the parties that pose key security threats to the region in the ACRS process. In September 1992, Syria and Lebanon declined to attend the ACRS working group in Moscow due to what they viewed as insufficient progress in bilateral talks, and Palestinian representatives were not even invited. The Palestinian Authority has since joined ACRS, but Syria and Lebanon have thus far refused to participate, though both states did take part in an experts meeting of the multilateral working group on water issues in June 1995, which included Israeli participants.

A key question facing the ACRS process, even if Egyptian policy changes, is how far it can proceed without involving Syria. Incorporating states like Iraq, Iran, and Libya into ACRS is an equally important task, and an even greater and longer term challenge. If cooperative action in the ACRS forum cannot address the main sources of conflict and insecurity in the region, states have less incentive to negotiate seriously.³⁰ Moreover, engaging states that pose the key security threats would help parties move away from old Arab–Israeli fears and allow them to begin to address broader and very real regional security concerns.

One analyst has gone so far as to declare that the ACRS process has been counterproductive because it has excluded critical states in the region. According to Aaron Karp, the non-participation of Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq has “undermined the credibility of the talks and highlighted the extent of regional differences.” Moreover, Karp predicts that it is too late for these countries to join ACRS without “sacrificing their domestic credibility and international dignity,” and that in the absence of new, more accommodating governance in these states, “it will not be possible to reinvigorate the current dialogue.” In this vein, he claims that any future efforts to construct a regional security regime will require a completely different approach.³¹

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³⁰ Levite and Landau state the mutual interest of states to cooperate is a necessary precondition or incentive for parties to be actively involved in CBM negotiations, along with the sense that without cooperative action, the causes of tension and “discomfort” in the region will not be removed. See Levite and Landau, “Confidence and Security Building Measures in the Middle East.”

³¹ Aaron Karp, “The Demise of the Middle East Arms Race,” *Washington Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (Autumn 1995): 41–42.

A second observer of the process holds that the geographic “make-up of ACRS, though undoubtedly the limits of the achievable at this time, was not conducive to real discussions of the deeper security problems in the region.” He claims that ACRS proponents were conscious of these shortcomings, and that it is important critics understand that “ACRS was never fated to get to the very deepest issues of regional security.”³² Instead, ACRS was an important “starting point.”

Effecting structural changes. The ACRS talks have also been hindered by their linkage to progress in the bilateral negotiations. Given the varying stages of progress in the bilateral talks—from none to little on the Syrian and Lebanese fronts to major steps and agreements with the Palestinian Authority and Jordan—the multilateral talks are licensed to ‘progress’ at the slowest possible speed.

The ACRS process can also be criticized for focusing the parties on the nuclear issue, however unwittingly, at the expense of conventional arms control. Confidence-building and arms control in the conventional field were not sufficiently integrated into the ACRS agenda, and received too little attention, according to Jentleson. Despite a statement in the DOP that set “reducing stockpiles of conventional arms and preventing a conventional arms race in the region” as important goals, he claims that “little focused activity on these subjects has been conducted at the interessionals.”³³ Some critics also say that excessive US control over ACRS and pressure to finalize an ACRS “Vision Paper” or DOP only caused that document to become a “vehicle for fruitless debate over the nuclear issue,” perhaps forcing the intensity of the clash between Egypt and Israel prematurely.³⁴ Such criticisms, however, must be tempered in light of Egypt’s seeming determination to push the nuclear issue, which it knew could only be a non-starter, in order to slow down the process.

Overcoming political obstacles. If primarily political, and not security, concerns are blocking progress in ACRS, it is difficult to predict just how CBMS can help break the stalemate. In theory, nonmilitary CBMS may continue to work to forge new economic and social ties among states that in turn chip away at political obstacles, but many of these exchanges have either been halted or slowed for political reasons. Indeed, the Cairo economic summit held in 1996 reflected the sour political state of the region, placing a much greater emphasis on promoting inter-Arab economic ties than on fostering Arab–Israeli joint

³² Jones, “Arms Control in the Middle East,” 67–68.

³³ Jentleson, “Middle East Arms Control,” 17.

³⁴ See the report by Peter Jones and Jorma Miettinen on the workshop, “Visions for Peace and Development in the Middle East,” 11–14 April 1996, *Pugwash Newsletter* 33, no. 4/5 (April/July 1996): 262.

ventures.³⁵ Furthermore, after the election of the Likud government in Israel in May 1996, both Oman and Qatar took steps to freeze their developing ties with Israel. Qatar announced the suspension of economic relations with Israel, while Oman held back its appointed representative to Tel Aviv.³⁶

Prospects for the Future

It is difficult to predict whether the ACRS talks will break through the current impasse. Accordingly, analysts disagree in their assessments of ACRS' future. While at least one observer claims that "it will not be possible to reinvigorate the current dialogue," others were less pessimistic.³⁷ Bruce Jentleson notes that despite the challenges facing ACRS, ". . . the fundamentals are there for building multilateral security cooperation in the Middle East. Nothing that has transpired in the last two years has changed that." He also argues that a certain degree of rivalry among states in any region is "normal," and cannot be expected to disappear even once cooperative security regimes are in place.³⁸

Even in light of the current impasse it is worth acknowledging the achievements of ACRS. Dalia Dassa Kaye notes that "the security CBMs included in the ACRS agenda contributed positively to the treaty between Israel and Jordan, with the communication, notification, and maritime arrangements first studied in ACRS included in the final treaty."³⁹ The Jordan-Israel treaty also adopted ACRS language, emphasized the need for a multilateral security forum in the region, and called for the creation of a Conference on Security and

³⁵ Indeed, the event was downgraded from a summit to a conference. Reporting on it, *Middle East Economic Survey (MEES)* commented that "This conference, then, was effectively about Arab countries . . . making individual pitches to the international investment community. . . . On the economic front, the brave words heard in Amman on integration between Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan . . . have come to naught." See James Drummond, "MENA Conference Well-Attended but Low-Key," *MEES* 39, no. 60 (18 November 1996): B1.

³⁶ According to *MEES*, "Qatar has been encouraging Enron not to pursue a projected deal to ship Qatar liquefied natural gas to Israel, and to divert this supply to the Indian market instead." Egypt, in turn, also shunned Israel for a gas deal with Turkey. In March 1997, Qatar reported that its relations with Israel were "frozen," while Oman gave signs of an impending thaw in its relations with Israeli, resuming work on an experimental Israeli project that was suspended just prior to the signing of the Hebron Accord. See Drummond, "MENA Economic Conference," B2; "Official says relations with Israel 'frozen,'" *Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB)*, ME 2858 MED/23, 4 March 1997, citing *Al-Ittihad* (Internet version), Abu Dhabi, 2 March 1997; "Israel: project suspended before Hebron accord resumed," *SWB*, ME 2857 MED/17, 3 March 1997, citing Voice of Israel broadcast, Jerusalem, 1 March 1997; and *Gulf States Newsletter*, July 1996, 4.

³⁷ Karp, "The Demise of the Middle East Arms Race," 41.

³⁸ Jentleson, "Middle East Arms Control," 14; 24.

³⁹ Dassa Kaye, "Madrid's Forgotten Forum," 75-76.

Cooperation in the Middle East (CSCME). More broadly, the Madrid peace process ‘provides a useful example of what is possible.’ According to one scholar,

Even if this process fails to fulfill the aspirations of all the parties involved, it nonetheless sets the precedent that political dialogue between apparently mortal enemies is possible and practicable in the post-Cold War environment of the Middle East. If the process fails, we can devote energies towards finding the right ingredients to make it work, rather than abandoning the entire effort.⁴⁰

It is also important to point out that the lengthy and, at times, seemingly interminable nature of negotiations is neither unique to the Middle East nor a yardstick by which to measure the potential success of negotiations. In Europe, for example, “The first negotiated CBMs were preceded by two decades of small tests of trust [and] further refinements unfolded over an additional two decades.”⁴¹ Thus, a valuable lesson to be learned from the European experience is the need for patience.

Perhaps most importantly, ACRS has helped link a network of arms control practitioners in the region, many of whom previously had little or no contact with one another.

Despite its shortcomings, ACRS has laid important groundwork for a future regional security regime in the region. Whether ACRS restarts or new initiatives take its place, parties will at least be more familiar with some of the techniques of arms control and confidence-building. Perhaps most importantly, ACRS has helped link a network of arms control practitioners in the region, many of whom previously had little or no contact with one

another. It is hoped that some of the personal and professional relationships established through ACRS will continue even in its absence and work to mitigate future tensions and misunderstandings among states in the region.

Track Two Efforts

Any negotiations conducted at the state-to-state level tend to foster formal, and at times inflexible, political stances among parties. The ACRS process was no exception, especially during early phases of negotiation on issues of great concern. For this reason, Track Two level meetings and conferences—unofficial gatherings designed to broaden regional

⁴⁰ Ehteshami, “Security Structures in the Middle East,” 73–74.

⁴¹ Cathleen Fisher, “The Preconditions of Confidence-Building: Lessons from the European Experience,” *A Handbook of Confidence-Building Measures for Regional Security*, 3d ed., Michael Krepon, Khurshid Khoja, Michael Newbill, and Jenny S. Drezin, eds. (Washington, D.C.: The Henry L. Stimson Center, March 1998), 277.

support for the ACRS process and to provide alternative fora for discussion—can be particularly useful. Track Two workshops convened by nongovernmental organizations provide license for parties to move away from political posturing if they wish to begin discussing possibilities for compromise, as well as possible avenues for CBMs, without compromising official government positions. Track Two workshops are a CBM in their own right, as they provide rare opportunities for informal contact among Arabs and Israelis. With

the ACRS process suspended on the official level, Track Two work has taken on a greater urgency.

In Track Two workshops and conferences, parties have debated a number of politically sensitive issues and have discussed new areas for CBM application in the Middle East. Workshops have focused on the nuclear issue, as well as on the nonmilitary and domestic sources of instability in the region, such as Islamic extremism, that affect the security perceptions of Middle East and North African states. The important nonmilitary functions that maritime CBMs could perform in the areas of pollution control and clean-up, fisheries management, and in the promotion of maritime industrial technologies have also been discussed. Track Two events also afford the opportunity for more detailed discussion of and training on specific types of CBMs, such as the technical inputs and infrastructure that might be required for verification and monitoring regimes. Following is a brief list of organizations that have formed the backbone of Track Two work in the Middle East and a description of the nature of their work.

SIPRI

The Middle East Security and Arms Control Project at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), directed by Peter Jones, has sponsored a series of workshops designed to solicit the opinions of regional security experts on the essential elements of a future security regime in the region. The workshops are held at various intervals (the first took place in Alexandria, Egypt, in February 1997) and are attended by a select group of senior academics and retired senior officials from the region.

Initially, the project focused on identifying the successful elements of existing regional security regimes and the underlying political, economic, social, and military factors that shaped them. Participants examine how these factors may be applied to the Middle East and also look at the interplay between global and regional security regimes. Through this process, it is hoped that regional participants will gain greater understanding of the potential of regional security models for application to their region, and will also come to understand one another's perceptions of the possible shape of a future peace in the region. This Track Two effort promises to be an important one and differs significantly from other Track Two work in the region because it allows participants the sustained, focused contact needed for personal relationships to develop and for practical proposals to take shape.

UNIDIR

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament (UNIDIR) has also consistently sponsored Track Two work in the region. A June 1996 workshop in Geneva brought together regional security experts from the 'core' Middle East states to discuss national threat perceptions and the ways and means in which to bring about defensive military force postures. A second workshop, originally scheduled to be held at the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in Abu Dhabi in the spring of 1997, did not take place. It was to focus on national threat perceptions in the Gulf and cooperative security, with special emphasis on the defensive restructuring of military forces.

IGCC

The Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation (IGCC) at the University of California at San Diego has also been deeply involved in promoting Track Two work, holding three major workshops over the course of five years and concentrating on the core states of the Middle East peace process. Key to the IGCC's Track Two work has been its focus on developing personal contacts and relationships among prominent security experts and officials in the Middle East. Workshop agendas that allow sufficient time for people to break into small groups, both to discuss specific political and security issues and to interact socially with one another, are key to building a lasting dialogue.

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Gulf/2000

The Gulf/2000 project, housed at Columbia University and directed by Gary Sick, a former US naval officer and National Security Council staff adviser, seeks to build a dialogue among a regular group of academics and government officials from the Gulf region. Three meetings were held between mid-1994 and mid-1995, and a book containing essays drawn from conference presentations by regional participants and experts was published in 1997.⁴² While only the second meeting focused specifically on security issues, including a session on confidence-building measures, the other two meetings addressed economic, political, and social factors salient to the region's stability. Most importantly, the project has provided a

⁴² See Gary G. Sick, and Lawrence G. Potter, eds., *The Persian Gulf at the Millenium* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

forum for a critical intra-Gulf dialogue that did not previously exist, and the rapport and openness that developed among participants by the end of the third conference made for frank exchanges of opinion on sensitive issues. These exchanges continue on an electronic network developed by the project, through regular e-mail and internet postings to participants.

Cooperative Monitoring Center

The Cooperative Monitoring Center (CMC) at Sandia National Laboratory in Albuquerque, New Mexico, managed by Arian Pregoner, has played a key role providing training on the technical expertise needed to properly implement verification measures and monitor various confidence-building and arms control agreements. In January 1994, the CMC participated in an IGCC Track Two workshop held in Greece, and in June 1994, they assembled a group of academics, military and government officials from Israel, Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar for a four-day workshop designed to explore how cooperative monitoring could facilitate regional security efforts in the Middle East. The two key areas of focus were border security and ballistic missiles. In January 1996, the CMC held a four-day Israeli training course on monitoring technologies. Sessions addressed the following topics: monitoring borders with remote and aerial sensors; missile and nuclear facilities monitoring; cooperative monitoring; and on-site inspections.

Search for Common Ground

The Search for Common Ground sponsors a number of issue-specific working groups in the Middle East. Their Security Working Group meets regularly to discuss regional security issues ranging from problems in the peace process, on the impact of a new Turkish government on the region, to US Middle East policy. Three “subgroups” meet regularly to examine Gulf security, regional security regimes, and weapons of mass destruction more closely. Participants are retired generals, diplomats, and security analysts from states in the region. Other Search for Common Ground working groups on Conflict Resolution, Civil Society, and the Media complement these efforts by building even wider networks in the region and increasing conflict resolution skills.

Other Subregional Efforts

While most attention has been focused on Arab–Israeli talks, confidence-building efforts have also been undertaken in several subregions of the Middle East, although with varied success. In the Gulf, perhaps the most contentious subregion, states are adopting some of the language and practices of confidence-building, but continue to engage in behavior that negates the reduction of tension. In the Maghreb, frameworks for regional cooperation have been subsumed by the pursuit of specific interests—domestic and regional—by individual states, and notions of mutual assistance and security put on paper have not been put into practice. Confidence-building efforts on the Euro–Mediterranean front, known as the

Barcelona Process, have been driven mainly by economic concerns of European states; accordingly, the process focuses on non-military CBMs. Of the various subregional confidence-building frameworks, it has been the most focused and sustained.

Boundary Resolution: Saudi Arabia and Yemen

Over the last several years, the Gulf states have made much progress resolving their border and territorial disputes. In some cases, the decisions to decide on and demarcate a border have been shrouded in secrecy, making it difficult to determine what role, if any, that CBMs may have played in helping both parties reach an agreement.⁴³

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Even where border negotiations are publicly known, and the instruments of confidence-building present (such as joint border committees and cooperative security agreements), it remains difficult to discern the precise contribution or application of confidence-building mechanisms. Saudi Arabia and Yemen, for example, have been slowly and painfully negotiating their border demarcation since 1992; minor clashes in the potentially oil- and gas-rich border area in early 1995 spurred both parties to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in February 1995. While

the MOU committed both states to demarcate their shared boundary along the Red Sea and to pursue a framework for negotiating their indeterminate border further east, progress in negotiations proved so slow that both sides called for high-level intervention in July 1996. This led to a security cooperation agreement signed in July 1996, which included cooperation to combat drug smuggling, as well as an economic, commercial, investment and technical cooperation agreement signed in August 1996.⁴⁴ Abdulaziz Al-Khuweiter, acting Saudi finance and national economy minister, said that the agreement was “a symbol of close cooperation that exists between the two sides. Each side has set the noble goal to bring about a fruitful outcome for any cooperative step.”⁴⁵ A joint committee for the demarcation of

⁴³ A border agreement signed by Oman and Saudi Arabia in March 1990 was not even released until 1992.

⁴⁴ “Yemen, Saudi Arabia sign cooperation agreement,” SPA news agency, Riyadh, as printed in *Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB)*, MEW/0451 WME/17, 3 September 1996.

⁴⁵ “Kingdom, Yemen sign trade pact,” *Riyadh Daily*, 31 August 1996, Sanaa/SPA.

Saudi–Yemen maritime borders rounds out the range of cooperative structures established between the two states.

According to border expert Richard Schofield, these cooperative steps between Saudi Arabia and Yemen may be purposely hollow because neither state truly intends to reach a settlement in the immediate future, preferring instead to retain the unsettled border for reasons of political leverage:

Despite the inexorable progress of recent years towards finalizing its land boundaries, Saudi Arabia may consider that there is more benefit to be gained in its dealings with San'a from an indeterminate border. The Yemen government itself may consider that the territorial compromises it would need to make to facilitate agreement would be too difficult to defend before its own domestic constituency.⁴⁶

It is therefore difficult to discuss the Saudi–Yemen case as an example of confidence-building in the Gulf, particularly in the context of tension-building actions like Saudi Arabia exercising troops on the Yemeni border in November 1997. In the end, the ringing statements of good neighborliness made by high-ranking officials on both sides, accompanied by hollow structures ostensibly designed to promote cooperation between the two states, may do more harm than good.

Iran's CBM Overtures

A stronger case for confidence-building in the Gulf may be made with respect to Iran's overtures toward its neighbors in the Arab Gulf—deemed Iran's "charm offensive" by some of the region's observers—throughout 1996.⁴⁷ While this diplomatic effort, largely consisting of a series of declaratory CBMs and CBM proposals in military and nonmilitary spheres, has been widely remarked upon, it is difficult to predict its impact. According to one expert, "the level of distrust between Iran and the Gulf Arab states should not be underestimated. Iran regards them as dangerously dependent on the West and, until recently, too ready to deal with Israel."⁴⁸ Distrust is traditionally high between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the two major states

⁴⁶ Richard Schofield, "Boundaries, Territorial Disputes, and the GCC States," in *Gulf Security in the Twenty-First Century*, David E. Long and Christian Koch, eds. (Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1997), 153.

⁴⁷ For a detailed examination of confidence-building in the Gulf, including Iran's "charm offensive," see Lawrence G. Potter, "Confidence-Building Measures in the Persian Gulf," in *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security, and Religion*, Gary G. Sick and Lawrence G. Potter, eds. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 231–248. See also "Reconciling with Iran?" *Gulf States Newsletter* 21, no. 550 (2 December 1996): 2–3.

⁴⁸ Potter, "Confidence-Building Measures in the Persian Gulf," 235.

(apart from Iraq) in the region, and both Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have reason to fear Iran's intentions. Presently, Iran and the United Arab Emirates are engaged in a sovereignty dispute over the islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs in the Gulf, and Bahrain claims, without much evidence, that Iran is behind the political disturbances in its Shi'a community.⁴⁹

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Moreover, it is difficult to tell whether these new diplomatic overtures represent any real change in Iran's policy toward the Arab Gulf. Senior Iranian officials' calls to implement 'joint security arrangements' or to promote bilateral relations in the Gulf are most often followed by statements also calling for an end to foreign intervention in the region. The latter objective has long been voiced by Iran, and Arab Gulf states have interpreted it as synonymous with Iran's desire to dominate the region. Therefore, Iran's offers to assist Qatar

at the time of its coup (February 1996), conduct joint war games with Kuwait (April 1996), form a bilateral security pact with Qatar (May 1996), or sign a non-aggression treaty with Gulf states (December 1996) are regarded with a high degree of suspicion by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Gulf observers. Are these genuine offers or are they means to gain a stronger foothold for future meddling in Arab Gulf affairs?⁵⁰ Most, but not all, of Iran's overtures have been refused.

Despite suspect intentions, Iran's willingness to engage in the language and practice of confidence-building cannot be ignored. Significantly, some of Iran's nonmilitary proposals have been successful. Iran and Kuwait have agreed to cooperate in transportation and telecommunications, and have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in April 1996 that called for cooperation in marine transportation, shipping facilities, and the prevention of sea pollution.⁵¹ Although Qatar refused Iran's offer to form a bilateral security pact in May 1996, the following month "two Iranian ships made the first friendly port visit to Doha in 17

⁴⁹ Though a 1971 MOU signed by the two states agreed that each had shared administrative rights to the island, it made no ruling on sovereignty. The sovereignty dispute resurfaced with new intensity in 1992, grew more heated with Iran's militarization of the islands in 1994, and remains tense.

⁵⁰ "Reconciling with Iran?" 2.

⁵¹ *Iran Digest*, 8 April 1996. Cited in Potter, "Confidence-Building Measures," 240.

years.”⁵² Iran and Saudi Arabia have also recently discussed developing trade relations, including a free trade zone.⁵³

High-level Iranian officials have also taken to promoting CBMs. Then-President Hashemi Rafsanjani endorsed them at a conference in Iran in December 1995, stating that “no country should be afraid of each other” and that “we should try to promote trust and confidence-building.”⁵⁴ The former Iranian foreign minister, Ali-Akbar Velayati, called for their application to the Gulf region in June 1996: “It is essential to forge vigorously [ahead] with the adoption of confidence-building measures in this region with a view to reinforcing the concept of predictability.”⁵⁵ A senior Iranian foreign policy official “has even suggested that the United States could facilitate confidence-building between the GCC states and Iran.”⁵⁶ The commander of the Iranian Army’s invitation to Iran’s Arab neighbors in May 1996 to hold joint military exercises “at any circumstances” was the first such offer ever made by the army.⁵⁷

Declaratory CBMs such as these are only effective if accompanied by positive action to reinforce them. This has not happened in the Gulf, especially between Iran and the UAE. ‘Positive’ declarations and gestures by both states have been interspersed with both cordial and heated exchanges over conflicting sovereignty claims to the islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs. Even when both countries state they support bilateral talks as a means to resolve the dispute, no action has been taken. In some instances, Iran’s actions have added fuel to the dispute: it has deployed missiles on the islands, constructed a power station and an airport, and is currently developing plans to locate a branch of a university on Abu Musa.⁵⁸

⁵² Reports by *Reuters* (7 May 1996) and *Xinhua* (5 June 1996). Cited in Potter, “Confidence-Building Measures,” 240.

⁵³ This was reportedly discussed by Iranian deputy commerce minister Hossein Noghre-kar Shirazi and the head of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce, Ismail abu Dawood, on 12 November 1996, during Shirazi’s visit to Saudi Arabia. Shirazi also met with the head of the Islamic Development Bank and a number of other senior Saudi officials. See *Iran Focus* 9, no. 11 (December 1996): 7.

⁵⁴ Rafsanjani, in *Ittila’at* (Tehran) 28 Azar 1374/19 December 1995, 1. Cited in Potter, “Confidence-Building Measures,” 239.

⁵⁵ Velayati address entitled “The Security of the Persian Gulf” to the Crans Montana Forum in Switzerland, June 20–23, 1996. Cited in Potter, “Confidence-Building Measures,” 239.

⁵⁶ George Moffet, “Iran’s UN Envoy Blames Sour Relationship on US” [interview with Kamal Kharrazi], *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 March 1996. Cited in Potter, “Confidence-Building Measures,” 239.

⁵⁷ *Xinhua*, 30 May 1996.

⁵⁸ “UAE protests to Arab League over Iranian plan for university on disputed island,” text of report on Egyptian radio on 11 December 1996, as printed in *SWB*, ME/2794 MED/13, 13 December 1996.

In other cases, Iran directly negates or contradicts its previous confidence-building efforts. A GCC statement was issued after the December 1996 summit that reaffirmed the UAE's sovereignty over Abu Musa and the Tunbs and severely criticized Iran's continued

States in the Arabian Peninsula continue to rely on bilateral defense pacts with the West, in combination with a system of power balancing and accommodation vis-à-vis their larger neighbors, rather than concentrating on integrating their defense forces or developing existing regional conflict resolution mechanisms.

occupation of these islands. Tehran responded with a conciliatory statement inviting its Arab neighbors in the Gulf "to take an initiative in bringing about a joint security arrangement of the nations in the region to guarantee stability, regional security and help the Islamic republic of Iran safeguard its vast territorial waters . . . in the interest of all."⁵⁹ Yet in another statement issued almost concurrently, Iran linked UAE sovereignty claims to Zionist expansionism: ". . . rather than trying to encourage the UAE to continue its bilateral talks with Iran, [the GCC] has prescribed expansionist designs against Iranian territories, thereby following the path of provocation and tension-mongering, which is favored by the Zionist regime."⁶⁰

Security in the Gulf: The Overall Picture

The prospects for cooperative security and defense cooperation in the Gulf remain bleak at present. States in the Arabian peninsula continue to rely on bilateral defense pacts with the West, in combination with a system of power balancing and accommodation vis-à-vis their larger neighbors, rather than concentrating on integrating their defense forces or developing existing regional conflict resolution mechanisms. Ambitious plans in 1995 to increase the size of a combined, GCC defense force, Peninsula Shield, to 100,000 from its current 8,000–10,000 manning level were soon dropped to a target of 20,000–25,000.⁶¹ GCC plans to build an integrated air defense system, at an estimated cost of \$300–400 million, are

⁵⁹ *Reuters*, "Iran Urges joint security steps with Arab Neighbors," 11 December 1996.

⁶⁰ The statement went on to claim Abu Musa and the Tunbs as "inseparable parts of the Islamic state of Iran," declare that UAE claims to the islands were baseless, and that these claims acted as a "cover-up for the conciliatory plans with the Zionist regime, which has occupied Holy Jerusalem and other Arab and Islamic territories." See "Iranian Foreign Ministry condemns GCC stance on Persian Gulf islands," text of report by Iranian radio on 10 December 1996, as printed in *SWB*, ME/2793 MED/8, 12 December 1996.

⁶¹ Phebe Marr, "US–GCC Security Relations, I: Differing Threat Perceptions," *Strategic Forum* no. 39, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University (August 1995), 3.

also viewed with skepticism.⁶² One observer of the region notes that “there is no evidence to suggest that [the GCC’s Commission for the Settlement of Disputes, established by Article Ten of the GCC Charter] has ever met to treat territorial disputes between member states.”⁶³ Similarly, the 1991 Damascus Declaration, in which Syria and Egypt agreed to act as guarantors of a collective regional security arrangement among GCC states, was ratified on paper but never implemented.

While cooperative security efforts stagnate, fissures among Gulf states may be growing. According to Gulf security expert Phebe Marr, the “. . . relaxation of the Cold War and tensions resulting from the Gulf War have increased strains among GCC states and loosened some GCC bonds.” She predicts that “in the face of sustained economic difficulties and a lack of agreement on threat perceptions, traditional fissures in the alliance could grow.”⁶⁴ Indeed, Qatar boycotted the closing session of the 1995 summit in Oman, and Bahrain boycotted the December 1996 summit held in Qatar, ostensibly due to a dispute with Qatar over Qatari nationals caught allegedly spying in Bahrain. More realistically, Bahrain’s boycott was linked to its long-standing sovereignty dispute over the Hawar Islands with Qatar.⁶⁵

Between the Arab Gulf states and Iran, the security picture is also cloudy. Given the prominent US military presence in the Arab Gulf as well as its dominant role in the peace process, confidence-building between Iran and the United States will be key to the future of Gulf security. A few actions or statements made by Iran in late 1996 seemed to suggest a more conciliatory Iran. For example, an op-ed by Kamal Kharrazi, then Iran’s Ambassador to the UN, on the situation in Afghanistan that appeared in the *Washington Post* on 4 November 1996, seemed to invite the United States to do two things, according to one analysis: first, to consider Iran as a pivotal player in the region; and second, to talk to Iran. Still, Iran’s intentions are difficult to interpret when statements calling for cooperation are

⁶² Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are apparently keen on the system, but the UAE, which has already invested in a similar system built by British Aerospace, is understandably less enthusiastic. See *Gulf States Newsletter* 21, no. 542, 12 August 1996, 4.

⁶³ Schofield also notes, “The Bahrain/Qatar dispute over Hawar and the shoals, the one dispute to have figured regularly on the agenda of the GCC during the last decades and a half, has been addressed at the ministerial level instead. Member states of the GCC have chosen generally not to refer territorial problems for formal treatment by the council.” See Schofield, “Boundaries, Territorial Disputes and the GCC States,” 146.

⁶⁴ Marr, “US–GCC Security Relations, I: Differing Threat Perceptions,” 3. For more on the economic pressures facing the region and their political implications, see Vahan Zanoian, “After the Oil Boom: The Holiday Ends in the Gulf,” *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1995): 2–7.

⁶⁵ For an overview of this and other Gulf territorial and boundary disputes, see Richard Schofield, “Mending Gulf Fences,” *Middle East Insight* (March/April 1996): 36–41.

undermined by other statements demonstrating a continued hard line opposition to the United States.

The surprising election of Mohammed Khatami, a moderate who had the support of much of the country's youth and women, as president of Iran in 1997 offers new hope to improving US–Iranian relations. The Clinton administration's initial reaction to his election was welcoming but cautious. Policymakers, remembering the dashed hopes after Rafsanjani's election as a moderate economic reformer, are waiting to see if Khatami will be able to deliver. US reticence to build bridges with Iran is also influenced by strenuous Congressional opposition in the United States to initiatives for improved relations with Iran in the absence of (what Congress views as) concrete steps to address Washington's concerns.⁶⁶ Khatami's range of options for improving relations with the United States appear to be limited by his fragile domestic position. Nonetheless, in a major conciliatory gesture in December 1997, Khatami issued a public offer for nongovernmental dialogue with the United States as part of a broader effort to mend bilateral relations with a number of countries, including Germany. The initial US response to this offer by US national security adviser Sandy Berger was that the US must judge Iran on what it does, not on what it says and that official contacts were necessary.⁶⁷

Confidence-Building in the Maghreb

Institutional structures and frameworks are lacking for cooperative security and confidence-building in the Maghreb. The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), formed in 1989, was intended to be a mechanism for political and economic cooperation in the Maghreb, tackling bilateral disputes between its members as well as formulating general Maghrebi policy toward specific issues, such as economic integration with Europe.⁶⁸ Part of the AMU's efforts were also to be devoted to defense and security cooperation; several of the articles of its founding document, the Treaty of Marrakesh, provide for “an assistance and mutual solidarity pact.”

⁶⁶ In marked contrast, however, many European states—skeptical of US claims about the level of threat posed by Iran—are pursuing improved relations with Iran—and disagree with United States efforts to isolate it.

⁶⁷ Khatami made his offer at press conference in Tehran on 14 December, voicing his hope for a “thoughtful dialogue” with the “great American people” in order to “get closer to peace, security and tranquility.” US national security adviser Sandy Berger contrasted Khatami's remarks with the militant anti-American speech of Ayatollah Khamanei, and said the test would be whether Khatami's conciliatory words “translate into restrictions in the behavior of Iran externally which is a threat to region and a threat to peace.” See David Hirst and Martin Kettle, “US wary as Iran offers dialogue,” *The Guardian*, 15 December 1997, 12.

⁶⁸ Member states include Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia.

A Defense Council was created in 1990, but according to one analyst, “these initiatives amount only to declarations of intent and have not yet had any practical application.”⁶⁹

The AMU was only slightly more successful in its efforts to promote regional economic cooperation. Within a few years of its formation, it became clear that states were pursuing national economic and political goals through bilateral means, rather than making the effort to present a united Maghreb front. Morocco and Tunisia pursued economic and free trade agreements with the European Union (EU); Algeria has completed the first phase of a four-phase plan to build pipelines to sell gas to Spain and Portugal; and Libya concentrated its efforts on rapprochement with Egypt. Politically, differences among states of the Maghreb remain sharp. Libya, placing priority on its relations with Egypt to the detriment of those with its western Maghreb neighbors, missed an AMU summit meeting in Casablanca in 1991.⁷⁰ When AMU member states supported UN sanctions on Libya in 1992 in the wake of the bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland, of a 747 commercial aircraft, Libya withdrew from the organization altogether. Algeria became absorbed with internal crises in the early 1990s and “had little time for the AMU.” Throughout its brief existence the AMU was hindered by the bitter state of Moroccan–Algerian relations; when the two states closed their border in 1995, the AMU effectively came to an end.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Article 14 promises “Any aggression to which a Member State is subjected will be considered as an aggression against the other Member States;” Article 15 commits Member States to “Undertake not to permit any activity or organization which could harm the security, territorial integrity, or political system of any other Member State.” See Fernanda Faria, “Security Policies and Defense Strategies,” in *Security in North Africa: Ambiguity and Reality*, F. Faria and Avaro Vasconcelos, Chaillot Paper 25 (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, Western European Union, September 1996), 50. Faria goes on to note, “as far as defense is concerned . . . Algeria, like its Maghreb neighbors, does not want to cooperate either within the AMU or in any other regional or international organization.” Faria, “Security Policies and Defense Strategies,” 42.

⁷⁰ See George Joffé, “The Development of UMA and Integration in the Western Arab World,” in *The Middle East and Europe: The Search for Stability and Integration*, 2nd edition, Gerd Nonneman, ed. (London: Federal Trust for Education and Research, 1993), 203.

⁷¹ Joffé, telephone interview with author, 6 March 1997. A Tunisian–Libyan initiative to mediate Algerian–Moroccan differences over Western Sahara in October 1996 was dismissed by Algeria as “aimless” and “in vain,” noting that the parties recognized by the United Nations to resolve the Sahara issue are Morocco and the Polisario Front. See “Algeria says Qadhafi mediation attempt over Western Sahara ‘aimless,’” text of report by Algerian TV, 31 October 1996, as printed in *SWB, ME/2759 MED/16*, 2 November 1996. The long-standing conflict for regional hegemony between Algeria and Morocco is linked directly to the Western Sahara’s struggle for self-determination. Since 1975, when Algeria allegedly reversed its support for the Moroccan–Mauritanian takeover of Western Sahara and began to provide critical political and military support for the Polisario Front (the Western Saharan independence movement), Algerian–Moroccan relations have been bitter. Strategically, Algeria viewed a future independent Western Sahara as a potential friendly access route to the Atlantic, whereas Morocco feared that a nominally independent but heavily Algerian-influenced Western Sahara “would have an encircling effect on Morocco,” improving the regional balance of power in Algeria’s favor. The UN has since assumed primary responsibility for ending the dispute and for taking steps to ensure Western Saharan political independence. For more information on the background and current status of the Western Sahara, see John Damis, *Conflict in Northwest Africa: The Western Sahara Dispute* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1983); Jarat

Euro–Mediterranean Confidence-Building

The early 1990s saw the emergence of southern European initiatives to form cooperative economic and security arrangements with their North African neighbors as trade and economic relations between the two regions grew, along with European fears of increasing south-north migration and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Maghreb.⁷² These efforts culminated in the Barcelona Process, or Euro–Mediterranean Partnership Initiative, launched in November 1995. Maghreb expert George Joffé describes the initiative as “the culmination of five decades of European policy towards the South Mediterranean region” that “echoes the series of attempts at building collective security structures in the Mediterranean in the past six years.”⁷³ Member states include the fifteen members of the European Union (EU) and eleven South Mediterranean states.⁷⁴ Though primarily an economic forum designed to stem the tide of migration into Europe by increasing economic opportunities within the southern Mediterranean states, the initiative also has a security component.

Similar to the CSCE process in Europe and the structure of the ACRS working group, the Barcelona Process adopted a ‘basket approach’ to discussions. Economic issues were placed in one basket; political and security issues in a second; and social and cultural development in a third.⁷⁵ Security issues, rather than political ones, have dominated the second basket, and it is seen as a potential forum to rejuvenate Spain and Italy’s 1990 proposal to form a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean, dismissed

Chopra, “Quitting Western Sahara,” *Geopolitics and International Boundaries* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 55–76; and Karin von Hippel, “Sunk in the Sahara,” *The Journal of North Africa Studies* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 95–116.

⁷² Spain and Italy introduced the concept of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) in 1990; France proposed a “Five plus Five” security dialogue between the five member states of the AMU and five southern European states (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Malta) in 1991; Egypt proposed establishing the Mediterranean Forum in 1994; and France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal created joint land-based and maritime forces (Eurofor and Euomarfor) in 1996 to use for collective security and humanitarian reasons in the Mediterranean. This last structure was viewed with suspicion by the states of the southern Mediterranean, as is NATO’s program to develop a southern Mediterranean dialogue. According to North Africa expert George Joffé, the South Mediterranean states consider the latter mechanism “to be a fundamentally European institute of collective security, which, almost by definition, will eventually be directed against them.” See Joffé, “Europe and North Africa,” (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, unpublished paper, no. 3), 2, and fn. 3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁴ South Mediterranean members include Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Malta. Libya was excluded due its involvement in the Lockerbie bombing and the ongoing UN sanctions against it. See Joffé, “Europe and North Africa,” 5.

⁷⁵ Joffé, “Southern Attitude towards Integrated Mediterranean Region,” (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, unpublished paper no. 2), 6.

at the time as being too ambitious.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, discussions on core security issues in the basket have not seen much progress. Maghreb states, not surprisingly, remain suspicious of collective European ‘rapid reaction’ forces slated for use in the Mediterranean. They also cast a worrying glance at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) nascent Mediterranean Dialogue (within the context of NATO’s Partnership for Peace initiative) and are frustrated by Europe’s lack of progress toward developing a Common Security and Foreign Policy, which would have implications for European policy toward the Maghreb. Most importantly, however, there is a sense that the real security issues of the region are strongly affected by the actions of the United States, which has thus far declined to consider true partnership with Europe in formulating Middle East policies. Given these circumstances, Joffé notes that “regional security issues within the partnership policy carry little weight.”⁷⁷

The Barcelona Process has also taken on broader security issues such as combating international terrorism and crime, especially drug smuggling. Progress in these areas has been somewhat impeded by disputes over who will finance the effort. Costs of fighting terrorism and smuggling aside, the formal and informal economies of the Maghreb states benefit significantly from the illegal trade in drugs.⁷⁸ Also underlying part of the Barcelona Process’ security agenda is Europe’s fear of the security implications of growing Islamic fundamentalism in the region, though this issue is perhaps best broached through the economic, not security, basket.

Despite these problems, the European Union, in the context of the Barcelona Process, has agreed to support ten confidence and security building measures, mostly nonmilitary in nature and designed to “encourage government to change and also to encourage the growth of civil society.”⁷⁹ One measure launched the Euro–Mediterranean Studies Commission project, which brings together international relations institutes throughout the Mediterranean and Europe to discuss issues of common concern.⁸⁰ Many of the participants from the Maghreb states include those who have been involved in ACRS Track Two work, and who are thus familiar with the basics of establishing collective regional security regimes.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 6–7.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁸ Morocco is estimated to receive up to \$1.8 billion annually from illegal cannabis exports. See Joffé, “Southern Attitude,” 7–8.

⁷⁹ Six of these were agreed in October 1996. Text of Speech, March 1997, by George Joffé, “Partnership with the EU: What’s in it for the Maghreb States?” at the first meeting of the Royal Institute of International Affairs series, “Research at Chatham House—Looking Forward in 1997,” 16 January 1997, 4.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Conclusion

CBMs have a mixed record in the Middle East. Though great strides were made in the first three years of the ACRS working group, particularly on the maritime front, states in the region must now decide whether they stand to benefit more from the current political impasse and status quo, or from a future mechanism to manage regional tensions and security concerns that may result from further dialogue. As with the confidence-building process in other regions, states in the Middle East must see tangible benefits from confidence-building in order to proceed further. It is difficult to predict whether ACRS has thus far provided sufficient stimulus or benefits to encourage parties to restart the process, but one crucial fact that ACRS has demonstrated is that “political dialogue between apparently mortal enemies is possible and practicable.”⁸¹

As with the confidence-building process in other regions, states in the Middle East must see tangible benefits from confidence-building in order to proceed further.

Confidence-building efforts within subregions of the Middle East, such as the Gulf and the Maghreb, face significant challenges. Although sources of conflicts and threat perceptions within these subregions are geographically contained and participants are not subject to the divisive strains and fears associated with the “normalization” of relations with Israel, intra-Arab and Irano–Arab rivalries within the subregions may prove just as difficult

to overcome. The array of advanced weaponry held by some states, including weapons of mass destruction (WMD), would make any subregional conflict potentially devastating. While it is encouraging that individual states such as Iran are increasingly adopting the diplomatic language of confidence-building, in most cases practice lags far behind declaration of intent. Infrastructures for regional cooperation—such as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the ill-fated Arab-Maghreb Union—are too often underutilized and underdeveloped, their confidence-building potential not fully exploited.

The future of confidence-building in the Middle East thus depends largely on the states of the region. The United States, the European Union, and other extra-regional sponsors of the peace process can encourage and pressure states to take steps, as well as provide practical training on how other regions have approached and implemented

⁸¹ Ehteshami, “Security Structures in the Middle East,” 73.

confidence-building measures. They cannot, however, help to build effective mechanisms for regional security without the full support and participation of the regional parties.⁸²



⁸² In November 1996, British foreign secretary Malcolm Rifkind's call to establish a cooperative regional security forum in the Middle East modeled on the CSCE was greeted with both surprise and disdain by Arab states. The Arab League announced that it was "surprised" by Rifkind's proposal, while Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa described it as "premature." Musa said that "talk of establishing an organization for cooperation in the Middle East amidst the existing negative atmosphere prevailing in the peace process is like putting the cart before the horse," and claimed that no such organization would be considered until a fair peace had been reached in the region, UN resolutions implemented, and a Palestinian state negotiated. See "Arab League surprised by Rifkind's idea of setting up regional security body," Arab Republic of Egypt Radio, Cairo, 6 November 1996; and "Musa describes Rifkind's call for regional cooperation forum premature," MENA news agency, Cairo, 5 November 1996, as printed in *SWB* ME/2763 MED/16 and MED/17. A joint report issued by EuroMesco working groups recommended that confidence-building in the Euro-Med context focus on promoting transparency, information and dialogue in a broad, nonmilitary sense, rather than model itself on the European approach and the CSCE/OSCE.