Advancing CTBT in the Middle East

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The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty offers an alternative mechanism to regulate and address loopholes within the NPT regime. CTBT is an instrument which offers a promising future and potential benefits not only to the Middle East, but to humanity as a whole. CTBT has something unique to offer and an added value, namely a solid verification system which is greatly needed by the region.

Iran, Egypt and Israel are important stakeholder within the Middle East and their ratification is essential for CTBT’s entry into force, i.e. annex II states. These are countries with different tendencies, varying interests and dissimilar doctrines. Hence addressing or analyzing annex II states in this region should take into consideration their specificities, obviously a unified treatment will not suffice. Despite this, one of the apparent commonalities between these three countries, referred to hereinafter as “the cluster” [1], is that they are primarily located in the Middle East, a region characterized by its acute conflict with its geographical boundaries still debated and a region that is a notable obstacle facing CTBTO universality.

Amongst annex II states located in the Middle East, two states have common borders, two states are members of a political alliance (namely NAM) and two states are now committed to peace, following an exhaustive conflict. The three Middle Eastern states which are not committed to CTBT represents 60% of MESA’s required weight to get CTBT into force [2].

Middle East Commitment to CTBT (WMDFZ definition adopted)

Positions and Obstacles
This analysis attempts to identify prevailing perceptions throughout the cluster. Drawing analogies with science proves to be helpful. Newton predicted that “every action is encountered by a reaction equal in magnitude, yet opposite in direction”. Newton’s prediction justifies to a great extent the behavior of the three countries. Deterrence plays an important role in this cluster and justifies to a great extent the behavior of countries within. Israelis claim that their survival was achieved via non-conventional capabilities, Egyptians refuse to join the Chemical Weapons Convention as a consequence and Iranians mention that so long that the threat of being attacked exists, concessions can not be made.
Generally speaking, obstacles facing CTBT implementation can be classified as historic and contemporary. Historically speaking, we have the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict with repercussions reaching out internationally. Contemporary factors include the Iran dilemma, as well as political unrest sweeping the Arab region. Perhaps one could add another category of obstacles facing CTBT which has to do with the inherent complication of nuclear weapons. A single category of weapons is governed by two legislative frameworks – one for countering proliferation and another one for banning tests.

Within the realm of CTBT, states have the choice to ratify voluntarily: this is a sovereign national option of tangible international consequences. Yet, we have a situation whereby a group of countries opted not to join CTBT. Signing and ratifying treaties is a foreign policy issue which has to be weighed against national interests and political gains. Joining treaties might not be an issue of concern to the layman, but most recently and with the advent of the Arab Spring foreign policy is becoming high on the agenda, even to the man on the street. By not joining treaties, political regimes may want to create the impression of not making any political concessions or losing a foothold. According to a recent survey by the Arab Institute for Security Studies conducted in a number of Arab countries, there was a wide prevailing perception indicating that rushing to signing and ratifying treaties is not necessarily the best course of action. There is also a wide belief that not joining treaties constitutes a good diplomatic option that provides political freedom and maneuverability, i.e. a political weapon or a bargaining card.

Revisiting positions of CTBT holdouts in the Middle East reveals that Iran and Egypt won’t feel the need to ratify as they are already members of the NPT and supposedly have no nuclear weapons to test as well as their legal inability to develop them. Israel, on the other hand, already has a ready-to-use stockpile and further testing is not a priority at the time being.

The following information sheds light on factors impeding CTBT ratification within Middle Eastern “annex II” states.

Israel’s Concerns

- With its nuclear ambiguity policy, Israel is potentially worried that other parties may abuse CTBT’s verification process and on-site inspections (viewed by Israel as a highly intrusive measure) to unveil its nuclear capabilities. According to Israelis, parties to the treaty may demand an external review process or inspections that could be utilized for intelligence purposes to learn about Israel’s stockpile and capabilities and Israel sees such arrangements as threatening its national interests
- Israel links its ratification to other states in the region, Egypt and Iran are the main concern (i.e. ratification reciprocity)
- Because of its close ties with the United States, the US tough stance on CTBT makes it harder for Israel to ratify the treaty. Although the United States ratification to CTBT would have a positive implication onto other clusters, a US ratification may subject Israel to some political pressure to ratify. An Israeli ratification of CTBT may not produce positive impact on regional positions as long as the future of an Israeli nuclear arsenal is still debated
Israel’s demand of being included in the MESA framework seems to be highly contested by Iran and other Arab states.

Iran’s Concerns
- Aware that ratifying CTBT may not produce a positive impact on P5+1 talks, Iran is worried that joining CTBT may have a negative impact on its nuclear program.
- CTBT verification procedures could utilized for intelligence purposes to disclose national secrets.
- Ratification reciprocity, which should ratify first?
- Committed to a WMDFZ, which is not matched by Israel and views CTBT as not contributing to disarmament.
- An opinion which does not portray an official Iranian position indicates that Iran wont ratify as they still want to retain the option of developing nuclear capabilities which includes testing.

Egypt’s Concerns
- Shares borders with a nuclear neighbor and maintains the image of being the leader of the Arab world. During the CTBT negotiations process, Egypt made it clear that in order for this treaty to go into effect, the major players in the region had to ratify it first.
- Political unrest (Arab Spring) and internal calculations (e.g. Egyptian walkout of the 2013 NPT prepcom).
- Egypt is a signatory of Pelindaba, a treaty which prohibits nuclear testing – so there is an acknowledgement of the importance of banning nuclear testing as well as a moral obligation. However a commitment to CTBT is seen as an extra obligation.

Overall, interaction among Middle Eastern “annex II” members could be classified as national, bilateral, multilateral, and external as shown by the figure below.

Cluster Interactions: National, Bilateral and Multilateral Perceptions
**Actors, Levels and Recommendations**

CTBT has faced some criticism and pessimism at times. Described as a treaty that has not reached maturity or a treaty that is taken hostage by other states, this analysis is optimistic that CTBT will hopefully crystallize in our lifetime. The important question is “what can be done?”

i- Civil Society

The civil society sector is a potential shaker of governments and capable of shaping public opinion. CTBTO could utilize and invest on civil society role to achieve progress. To avoid any possible complications, civil society involvement needs to be institutionalized and structured. Public initiatives, academic institutions and think tanks have the ability of exerting pressure on governments to accede to a treaty. Needless to say, the influence of civil society sector depends on the relative strength of the organization as well as government’s susceptibility to public opinion and civil initiatives.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has an advanced level of coordination with civil society actors and maintains an active working relationship; OPCW has been effective in institutionalizing the engagement of civil society sector via the Chemical Weapons Convention Coalition (CWC Coalition), this is an international forum for civil society organizations to promote a world free of chemical weapons [3]. The CWC Coalition general meeting is usually held at OPCW headquarters in the Hague, often with the participation of the OPCW Director-General. In May 2010, OPCW introduced a "Civil Society Blog" with the sole purpose to 'facilitate and encourage informal communication with external stakeholders in this sector'. OPCW has welcomed the participation of NGOs in its Annual Conference, thus providing the chance to present their work, discuss their respective strategies and potential collaboration with state parties. Recently, OPCW hosted a high level meeting with think-tank specialists in the Hague with the participation of OPCW DG and the Media and Public Affairs Branch at OPCW (June 2012).

Today, there are a number of partnership schemes with civil society that may prove useful for CTBTO – take for example the fusion between formal and non-formal tracks at the Nuclear Security Summit. This provides an important model to consider where civil society engagement within the nuclear security summit could be established and regulated.

ii- Other Actors

Actors on the local level include retired officials and former statesmen, universities (academic institutions) and parliamentarians. CTBTO has invested on Massive Online Course schemes (MOOC), CTBTO may consider engaging in other forms of education development, e.g. sponsoring awareness campaigns, young leaders debates, CTBTO scientific days … etc.

Media is an important player, creating a positive perception within media. In recognition to the importance of media, the Arab Institute for Security Studies organizes an annual training course for journalists and media representatives on nuclear issues.
The following list indicates possible local and external actors.

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<th>Israel</th>
<th>Israeli Disarmament Movement, Israeli Pugwash, ICAN</th>
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<td>Iran</td>
<td>Green Party of Iran</td>
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<td>Supporters of the Fatwa (fatwa against nuclear weapons)</td>
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<td>Association of Wounded and Disabled Soldiers</td>
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<td>Egypt</td>
<td>ICAN Chapter</td>
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<td>Egyptian Pugwash</td>
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iii- Creative Formulations

“Gift baskets” is an innovative concept adopted throughout the nuclear security summit process (initially implemented by the United States) that could be employed by CTBTO; here countries are given the opportunity to offer a ‘gift basket’, an extra initiative. The idea is for presenters of such gift baskets to acquire the backing of as many countries as possible, which will in turn function as role models for a given aspect of security.

A highly creative engagement is the development of a capacity building programs through donating CTBTO secondhand equipment to labs and research facilities in annex II states. Promoting educational curriculums specially designed for military colleges is another innovative mechanism worth considering.

Developing intermediate confidence building measures is highly needed. Within the Arab Consortium meeting held in Amman in 2013, the Arab Institute for Security Studies proposed the formulation of “No First Testing” as a possible intermediate measure that could relieve misconceptions.

iv- The Zone and Beyond

Whether CTBT contributes to disarmament or vice versa, its obvious that any advancement in the zone issue would positively impact CTBT’s status in the Middle East. NPT 2010 REVCON made a significant breakthrough in terms of adding delivery vehicles to the scope of a WMDFZ. The inclusion of a test ban to the scope of prohibition will automatically resolve complications facing CTBT ratification within member states.
Complications within the Middle East cluster are usually linked to the persisting regional conflict. Needless to say that resolving the Arab Israeli conflict would significantly impact holdout in the region as well as outside the region. This might not take place in the short run, so incremental steps are highly needed.

References

[1] Terminology: the terms cluster, region will be used interchangeably to denote the Middle East region

[2] MESA - Middle East and South Asian (MESA) regional grouping