

Jordan's Chairmanship of the Nuclear Security Contact Group *Sustaining Progress on Nuclear Security in the Context of CBRN Challenges*

PART II

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This POLICY FORUM issue, a continuation of POLICY FORUM No. 4, will first analyze opportunities and obstacles related to cooperation in the area of nuclear security, which includes CBRN challenges. It makes the following point: Cooperation can potentially act as a unifier for states in the Middle East/Gulf, but this should not be overstated. Nuclear security can hardly be tailored to the needs of the splintered region, but rather to individual countries, which may then be incentivized to cooperate at an operational level. An incremental approach toward flexible forms of cooperation ('minilateralism') is currently the most likely strategy to make any progress in the region, and Jordan's leadership can certainly be helpful in this respect. Finally, this POLICY FORUM recommends concrete steps for the Nuclear Security Contact Group. It concludes on a cautious note: The region may be far from creating common standards for or unified approaches to nuclear security, but the hope is that much like the Nuclear Security Summit process, the Contact Group can continue to make progress toward finding common norms and standards, in lieu of stricter measures, in order to appeal to a broader audience. Definitions of all acronyms used already in Part I (POLICY FORUM No. 4) can be found there.

Prospects for Regional Cooperation: Opportunities and Obstacles

Jordan has been recognized as one of the indisputable leaders in the promotion of nuclear security in the Middle East/Gulf region, as evidenced by its track record in recent years. Notwithstanding the uncertain prospects for the sustainability of the Nuclear Security Contact Group, its operational model and bottom-up approach, similar to that espoused at the Summits, have undoubtedly made the case for "minilateralism". This term refers to alternative forms of collective action to traditional governmental cooperation, and has become a prominent feature of contemporary cooperation (Patrick, January 5, 2016). The notion that flexible forms of cooperation should be utilized as a policy tool in lieu of more rigid, legally binding, top-down approaches is certainly not a new concept, and in fact will never be able to fully replace such comprehensive measures.

The evolving nature of the threats facing the world today, however, warrants new responses that address these security threats. Two such cooperative approaches include the CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative of the European Union (EU) and the

Radiation Detection Training Center, two regional initiatives in which Jordan continues to lead by example.

The EU's CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative, for which one of the eight secretariats is based in Jordan and hosted at the Middle East Scientific Institute for Security (MESIS), is a voluntary project that seeks to enhance cooperation at the local expert level. Approximately 12 of the 59 countries involved are from the Middle East, and they work in sub-regional clusters to develop indigenous national action plans and policies. Specific identified threats such as illicit trafficking and dual-use materials are then addressed on a project basis, which inherently promotes ownership of the work in each participating country (van der Meer, May 2018). As a tool for cooperation, this model can be adapted across various countries to deal with specific issues because of its promotion of tangible operational outcomes that serve states' individual interests. One such example is the 2016 "Falcon Table Top Exercise," a region-wide cooperative effort that emphasized operational cooperation and information-sharing regarding the detection of and response to nuclear and radiological threats.

The *Radiation Detection Training Center*, located in Amman and established by MESIS, is still in its nascent phase of

development. It was created with the primary objective of providing the technical knowledge and practical skills necessary for stakeholders from across the region to counter the threat posed by radiological and nuclear materials. Greater attention to this risk has been generated by the following factors: the political instability being experienced in a number of countries in the border-dense region; the region's susceptibility to illicit trafficking; and the presence of non-state actors who have expressed interest in the trafficking of radiological material. For those countries that see these risks as a genuine national concern, the Center provides a novel opportunity to strengthen and sustain a niche nuclear security capacity.

These examples show the extent to which non-nuclear weapon states can still play a role in nuclear security. The Jordanian model of actively supporting nuclear security norms even though it does not possess any weapons-usable nuclear material is witnessed across a number of states. The 2018 "Nuclear Security Index" of the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) reported that one of the key trends over the past year has been that states without nuclear materials are becoming cognizant of and actively addressing the risk that their territories could be transit points or destinations for malicious activity involving nuclear or radiological materials.



» *Nuclear security has a very specific aim of ensuring the prevention and detection of malicious acts dealing with nuclear or radiological material, and a sufficient response to such acts. Yet its association with non-proliferation could actually hurt its potential as a unifying factor in the Middle East, where a number of countries have rather strong views about the international community's unequal progress on non-proliferation and disarmament.* «

Despite these positive prospects for regional cooperation, two different kinds of obstacles can be observed. The first is the troubling finding of the 2018 “Nuclear Security Index” that, in general, deteriorating risk environments and political instability could potentially derail efforts to improve nuclear security conditions. This is particularly true for Middle East countries: The “Nuclear Security Index” indicates four out of five countries with the lowest score for their risk environments as being from the Middle East, i.e. Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. As to the overall nuclear security scores of countries without weapons-usable nuclear material in terms of their commitment to international legal instruments, domestic capacities, and risk environments, over one-third of states from this region rank in the bottom third of a total of 154 countries.

While the transnational nature of nuclear security threats should facilitate cooperation on nuclear security matters as a potential unifier for regional states, this overlooks an important aspect: The characteristics and extent of this threat, however, are not commonly shared among states, with some ascribing more urgency to it than others. This absence of consensus on defining the extent of the threat is one of the contributing factors to the situation that multilateral cooperation is likely to meet significant political resistance and unlikely to progress in any other way than incrementally (Bowen/Cottee/Hobbs, 2012: 356). This is particularly true in the case of the Middle East, where prospects for even the most basic security cooperation can be hindered by various political considerations and specific security-related issues. As such, and despite the fact that nuclear security can easily be seen as an obvious example where cooperation is the logical and even self-serving option, it is still not a guarantee that it will occur (Saab/Goren, February 28, 2018).

In addition to the absence of a common threat, which has long underpinned the lack of a formal security framework in the region (Bin Nasser/Auda, March 7, 2018), the second critical factor that can limit the prospects of regional cooperation on nuclear security is the indirect yet inherently inextricable link between nucle-

ar security and non-proliferation. Nuclear security has a very specific aim of ensuring the prevention and detection of malicious acts dealing with nuclear or radiological material, and a sufficient response to such acts. Yet its association with non-proliferation could actually hurt its potential as a unifying factor in the Middle East, where a number of countries have rather strong views about the international community's unequal progress on non-proliferation and disarmament.

The “tug-of-war between the disarmament camp and non-proliferation camp of nuclear diplomacy” (Hugo, June 2017: 3) resonates significantly louder in the Middle East, where some states continue to struggle with the legacy of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the thus-far failed promise to establish a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, developing countries, including those in the region, fear the consequences that new instruments that impose additional obligations may have on the peaceful use of nuclear energy (Bowen/Cottee/Hobbs, March 2012), an inalienable right that many view as being threatened. For instance, the ‘123 Agreement,’ which establishes the framework for nuclear cooperation between the United States and other countries such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, is a case in point. The U.S. takes the view that a number of fuel-cycle activities, including enrichment, heighten proliferation concerns. But when strict restrictions are placed on countries like Jordan and Saudi Arabia to address these concerns, tensions are likely to arise, because these are seen as sovereign issues that fall well within countries' international rights (Kubbig, 2018).

Conclusions and Recommendations: Concrete Steps for Sustaining Progress

Jordan's recent chairmanship of the Nuclear Security Contact Group, combined with its experience in various cooperative initiatives, is increasingly cementing its position as the regional model for science diplomacy. In addition to housing SESAME, the Synchrotron-light for Experiment-



tal Science and Applications in the Middle East (a promising regional research collaboration), Jordan's Royal Scientific Society also hosted the 2017 World Science Forum, and has largely been at the helm of cooperative scientific endeavors in the region.

Amman is a member of the majority of nuclear security-related international agreements and a promoter and developer of some of the most distinctive and flexible forms of cooperation across the Middle East/Gulf. Therefore, Jordan is uniquely situated in that it is able to strike the balance between adhering to international norms – conceptual as they are – and tailoring these best practices to its own domestic requirements, i.e. political priorities and economic constraints. While challenges certainly remain, and political and economic realities may hinder prospects for progress and cooperation, any such tensions have not yet proved to be detrimental in the realm of nuclear security. It remains to be seen whether the scientific community and the nuclear security community can assist and support the disarmament and non-proliferation community to deal with the above-mentioned problems associated with the latter policy field.

The complexities associated with issues of nuclear diplomacy and governance indicate that there is not much interest in initiating additional burdensome mechanisms to address a threat that was, arguably, blown out of proportion, given the high-level attention it has attracted and been given for over six years from 2010 to 2016. The various nuclear security instruments, initiatives, and agreements that already exist should continue to be promoted across the region, particularly to states that have not signed up to them. The entry into force of the 2005 Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) immediately after the last Washington Nuclear Security Summit on May 8, 2016 is one of the most positive nuclear security developments in recent years.

It became thus legally binding and is now called the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and Nuclear

Facilities (CPPNMNF), since it aims to prevent terrorists from acquiring nuclear material and sabotaging nuclear facilities. And yet the amended Convention is limited to material and facilities for civil purposes only – unlike the original Convention, the amended version includes a provision explicitly stating that it will not apply to military nuclear material and facilities (IISS/CNS/VCDNP, 2016: 22). The fact that the IAEA will hold regular review conferences on the implementation of the CPPNMNF – the first is envisioned for 2021 – can also be considered a notable success. Whether there is any appetite among the states of the region to treat this as a catalyst for regional cooperation on nuclear security matters (and, hence, CBRN-related challenges), however, still remains to be seen. States that have not already ratified the CPPNMNF should be encouraged to do so.

The region may be far from creating shared standards or unifying approaches in the area of nuclear security, but the hope is that much like the Nuclear Security Summit process, the Contact Group can continue to move toward finding ways for common norms and standards, in lieu of stricter measures, in order to appeal to a broader audience. ■

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