

**Task Force on the Technical Dimensions of a
Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East**

**A Concept “Roadmap” for
WMDFZ Implementation**

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Introduction

The objective of establishing a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction is shared in principal by all governments in the region. Political and strategic realities continue to make achievement of that objective elusive. The WMDFZ Task Force was formed as a Track II mechanism to explore in more depth specific technology and policy challenges associated with implementing a regional WMDFZ, and to identify potential opportunities for near-term confidence building and cooperation. Recognizing political constraints, the Task Force seeks to promote conversation on key issues and build a framework of scientific, technical and, policy understanding that might inform future policymakers when and if official discussions on a WMDFZ in the Middle East become politically feasible.

This document presents a concept “roadmap” for WMDFZ implementation. It is based on insights from Task Force discussions, other Track II interactions, and existing literature from the academic and policy communities. The roadmap is not intended to represent a definitive blueprint for implementation. Rather, it is designed to stimulate new and innovative thinking on a contentious issue, providing an alternative and more nuanced framework for exploring key policy and technology challenges associated with WMDFZ implementation. The concept roadmap is also intended to inform future direction for the Task Force by providing a systematic means for the group to identify new and productive research directions.

4 Phases of Implementation

The concept roadmap is illustrated in Figure 1. Implementation is divided into four distinct (though overlapping) phases. The Y-axis of the figure represents substantive progress in the direction of a fully implemented WMDFZ. It also suggests the complexity of the task at hand in terms of both political and technical implementation challenges.

The X-axis of the figure represents time, which for conceptual purposes is indefinitely defined. Finalization of a WMDFZ might take place in five years or five decades; in any case, the roadmap still envisions four phases. It is also worth noting that these phases would likely not be equivalent in duration, nor would the beginning of a new phase necessarily signal the abrupt end of a previous phase. Additionally, the phases for implementing a zone for each WMD subtype (biological, chemical, and nuclear) would not necessarily have to take place in tandem. It may be possible to move forward faster on certain WMD. This is suggested in the figure on implementing a biological weapons free zone (BWFZ); Task Force discussions have hinted at greater agreement across countries on BW concerns than other subtypes.

Parallel to the X-axis is a red trend line indicating the evolving strategic context in which implementation will take place. Obviously, the implementation of a WMDFZ will be impacted by a multitude of strategic developments. These might include movement on the regional peace process, the actions of non-state actors, developments on conventional weapons acquisitions, or intervention by external actors. All of these strategic developments are not necessarily predictable. They are however closely tied to the success or failure of WMDFZ implementation. It would probably be a useful Task Force exercise to better define certain points along this trend line, linking specific key strategic developments to progress on the WMDFZ front.

Phase I

The first phase of implementation is labeled “dialog and concept formation.” Arguably, the region has been in Phase I for more than three decades since the concept of a regional nuclear weapons free zone (NWFZ) was first proposed in the 1970s. Government to government dialog on implementing a zone has been sporadic and contentious, while more substantive exchange has taken place in academic and Track II settings.

The Task Force itself is actively engaged in Phase I activity. Interactions to this point have largely focused on concept formation, particularly on biological weapons issues. Discussions have suggested that four fundamental “pillars” would be needed to support implementation of a regional BW free zone. These include **prevention** of the acquisition or use of BW by state or non-state actors; **response and mitigation** in the event a BW attack takes place; **enforcement** of international or regional agreements, laws, standards, and best practices designed to prevent acquisition, development, or use of BW; and **peaceful use cooperation** on legitimate biological research in the interest of bettering mankind and the public welfare.

Free zones encompassing other WMD types will require the support of similar fundamental pillars. Example pillars are illustrated in Figure 1 under Phase I. The Task Force has yet to explore chemical weapons (CW) and nuclear weapons (NW) challenges in depth, so these example pillars are only for illustrative purposes. The point is to demonstrate that Phase I activities writ large should be geared toward reaching some kind of intellectual (if not policy) consensus on these pillars for all WMD.

Phase II

Though essential, Phase I of the roadmap is largely an intellectual exercise. Phase II transitions efforts to activities supporting real-world implementation, in the form of confidence building and technical exchange. It aims to bring together policy and technical experts from relevant countries to undertake cooperative projects on issues of practical relevance to WMDFZ implementation. These activities do not constitute actual implementation of a zone, but should contribute to developing key foundations while promoting linkages across national stakeholder communities (e.g. research communities, academic institutions, or even militaries). As in Phase I, Phase II activities do not necessarily require the complete buy-in of governments; engagement can take place in the Track II and non-government realms if necessary. However, government recognition (if only tacit) of these activities’ value would be desirable and indeed helpful for facilitating productive exchange.

In Figure I, potential confidence building and technical exchange activities are listed. These include the collaborative development of **draft agreements**, laying out the major legal and organizational elements of a future WMDFZ; **draft codes of conduct** for governing and regulating legitimate peaceful research in the biological, chemical, and nuclear sciences; and **statements of principle** on standards and best practices for controlling WMD, agreed upon and signed by key figures in relevant stakeholder communities. S&T-focused activities might include collaborative **technical R&D** and **demonstration projects**, developing and showcasing technologies potential relevant to implementing safety, security, materials control, and even verification measures in a future zone. General **awareness building** is also an important cross-cutting activity in Phase II. Task Force discussions suggest that awareness of fundamental WMD policy and technology issues is exceptionally low across government and non-government stakeholder communities in the region, presenting a serious impediment to future WMDFZ implementation.

Phase III

Phase III begins the process of partially implementing (at a national level) key elements of a regional WMDFZ, though it stops short of requiring countries to fully renounce WMD and dismantle existing arsenals. It is here that the explicit buy-in and initiative of participating governments becomes essential. It goes without saying that transition to Phase III implies a major shift in the regional strategic context, with governments having reached a point where exchange on highly sensitive strategic issues has become politically and practically feasible. One can envision Phases I and II engagements in the near term (the Task Force being an example); the transition to Phase III may lie many years ahead (though an unexpected yet major change in the strategic context could of course accelerate the timeline).

The most basic example of Phase III activity would be **government to government strategic dialog**, with officials discussing and negotiating WMD control issues at a face-to-face Track I level (though perhaps still behind closed doors). More significant Phase III implementation might include **transparency measures** designed to better convey information regarding capabilities and intentions; **strategic restraint measures** intended to deescalate tensions through modifying the deployment postures of key military capabilities; or even the reduction or elimination of certain capabilities through verifiable **arms control**. **Cooperative monitoring** through the mutually agreed upon application of surveillance and detection technologies could serve as a means for facilitating transparency and verification. Governments might even engage in **cooperative threat reduction**, working collaboratively to minimize the threat presented by unsecured WMD materials, technologies, and expertise.

Phase IV

Phase IV initiates the WMDFZ endgame. It is in this stage that governments make a definitive and mutually agreed upon policy commitment to fully renounce the production, stockpiling, and use of WMD (and most likely associated delivery systems). This last phase is where all the foundational elements identified in Phase I come together to form coherent biological, chemical, and nuclear weapon free zones. Activities undertaken in Phases II and III will have served to build the awareness, capacities, stakeholder networks, and confidence necessary to facilitate and maintain long term implementation of the zones.

Phase IV includes **accession** to the zone, which may include the signing and ratification of new or existing treaty frameworks. It would also include **dismantlement** of existing WMD arsenals, along with concurrent **verification** that dismantlement has indeed taken place (and likely ongoing verification to insure that arsenals are not reconstituted). Phase III-type activities, like transparency and cooperative monitoring, may continue to be employed for some time to maintain reassurance and confidence. There might also continue to be value added from conducting Phase I and II engagements at the Track II level, where new or emerging issues can be discussed, policy suggestions formulated, and technologies vetted for future application in reinforcing long-term implementation of the WMDFZ.

Additional Insights and Conclusions

Implementation of a real-world WMDFZ will certainly be far more complex than this document suggests. It is only a first attempt at articulating a vision for the road ahead. The roadmap is intended to serve as a starting point and to stimulate discussion in the Task Force toward development of a more comprehensive and consensus vision. To that end, next steps in the mapping exercise might include:

- Deliberation as to whether or not the “phased” conceptualization is appropriate, and if so, whether or not additional phases should be added (or existing phases subtracted);
- Reaching consensus on the “pillars” supporting implementation of the chemical and nuclear weapon free zones;
- Defining key points along the “strategic context” trend line, linking specific developments to progress on the WMDFZ front;
- Identifying additional or alternative implementation measures for Phases II, III, and IV;
- Drafting “action plans” for each phase that lay out practical steps for moving forward toward the next phase.

To this point, international discussions on a Middle East WMDFZ have too often been mired in dichotomous and irreconcilable rhetoric. For example, “Implementation of a WMDFZ is a prerequisite for regional peace” vs. “Regional peace is a prerequisite for implementation of a WMDFZ.” Such rhetoric does very little to promote constructive dialog on advancing a concept that in principle, all countries agree upon as mutually beneficial. Task Force discussions have demonstrated that in a Track II setting, it is possible to move beyond talking points and have a candid discussion on the real challenges at hand. Presently, no government or non-government organization has submitted a comprehensive, multistep plan for WMDFZ implementation that represents a middle ground between contending viewpoints. If the Task Force (ideally incorporating all relevant actors in the region) can reach a consensus opinion on the basic parameters of a functional roadmap, it will have made a major contribution toward advancing current intellectual and policy debates.

Figure 1: Concept WMDFZ Roadmap

