



PLOUGHSHARES FUND

## *Meeting of the SuPR (Sustainable Partnership with Russia) Group*

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### **THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION REGIME**

*A Policy Memo*

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The United States and Russia have significant strategic political, economic, and security interests in the Middle East. The overlap of interests depends partly on how the Middle East is defined,<sup>1</sup> but strict geographical limits are less than satisfying because of complex historical interactions. In geopolitical terms, the Middle East is characterized by uneven distribution of natural resources (energy, water, navigation routes), of socio-economic development, and of political stability. Recent political turmoil in Egypt, Yemen and Sudan, the growth of terrorism in the region that affects Russia and the United States particularly, and the destabilizing nature of Iran's clandestine nuclear program all point to an urgent need for dialogue and cooperation between U.S., Russian and regional leaders on a roadmap for stabilization.

Amb. Lysenko's thoughtful paper called for strengthening existing international legal instruments such as the NPT, negotiations on a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, a robust IAEA safeguards agreement, regional participation in the CTBT, CWC and BWC, confidence-building measures, nuclear cooperation and fuel assurance systems such as the Angarsk international fuel bank and fuel leasing arrangements. I support all of those suggestions with a few modifications for discussion in our meeting, but would like to focus this policy memo on a framework for sustainable, peaceful nuclear partnership in the Middle East. Such a framework should encompass energy, security, and arms control initiatives that reduce the nuclear threat and risks to all while enhancing energy security. In considering the kinds of initiatives we might undertake, three questions important to ask are:

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<sup>1</sup> The CIA defines the Middle East as including Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bahrain, Gaza, Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, UAE, West Bank and Yemen.

- Does the initiative reduce nuclear risks (growth in stockpiles of nuclear material, risk of terrorist access to such stockpiles)?
- Does the initiative improve energy security (reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy resources)?
- Does the initiative enhance confidence in countries' intentions related to nuclear energy and nonproliferation?

## **1. Energy Initiatives**

Energy security depends on reliable, affordable, diversified and sustainable energy resources. The Middle East is a new venue for nuclear energy, which presents opportunities to “do it right.” The particular challenges of the Middle East (terrorism, political distrust, Israel’s nuclear arsenal and Iran’s clandestine nuclear program) caution against a competition among vendors that lowers nonproliferation standards and a competition among recipients to acquire national prestige and/or latent nuclear weapons capabilities through nuclear energy. Initiatives related to energy should focus on all energy sources, without singling out nuclear energy, and emphasize regional approaches to electricity supply. Under the ARASIA agreement, a limited set of countries in the Middle East has engaged in nuclear technical cooperation and this should be expanded to more countries.<sup>2</sup> Approaches could include regional fuel cycle centers to distribute capabilities and/or linking of electricity grids for smaller states. Gulf Cooperation Council states have begun a limited dialogue on cooperation related to nuclear energy but few specific initiatives have emerged. Individual states are seeking bilateral cooperation related to other energy sources, but there should be a broader push for regional approaches to energy security and diversification.

The United States, Russia, and other states that supply power reactors need to share more information on the standards they employ for nuclear cooperation agreements. Russia’s fuel leasing approach with Iran should be extended to all states in the region. However, since not all vendors (including U.S. vendors) have the same capability to lease fuel, the United States and Russia should collaboratively explore mechanisms for ensuring the same outcome regardless of the vendor.

Although U.S.-Russian collaboration on nonproliferation and nuclear security is both inwardly (bilateral) and outwardly focused, U.S.-Russian energy cooperation rarely ventures beyond the bilateral agenda to assistance to other regions. U.S.-Russian collaboration here could mirror the “clean” energy assessments the IAEA has provided to ARASIA members (on renewables, nuclear and clean coal) and contribute to efforts under the UN’s recent designation of 2012 as the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All.

## **2. Security Initiatives**

Recent U.S. efforts have focused on the Gulf states and the necessity to enhance security vis-à-vis first Iraq and now Iran. U.S.-Russian collaboration could enhance transparency across the region as well as demonstrate a unified approach to emerging security threats. It could also aid U.S.-Russian discussions on ballistic missile defenses against Iranian ballistic missiles.

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<sup>2</sup> ARASIA has conducted 15 projects since 2002. The group includes Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen

On enhancing nuclear security, specific confidence-building measures such as pledges against the use of force against peaceful nuclear facilities, as Amb. Lysenko suggested, are helpful. In the run-up to the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit, efforts to improve understanding of nuclear security risks and measures to reduce those risks could include a workshop sponsored in the Middle East, patterned after the recent Saudi conference on UNSCR 1540, but focused on next steps.

### **3. Arms Control Initiatives**

As Amb. Lysenko pointed out, several countries in the Middle East still need to ratify an assortment of arms control measures, including the CTBT, BWC and CWC. Several also still need to sign an Additional Protocol for strengthened IAEA safeguards. The United States and Russia should push for adoption by the Nuclear Suppliers Group of requiring the Additional Protocol as a condition of supply.

Two critical new measures are the 2012 Middle East WMD-free zone conference and fissile material production cutoff treaty (FMCT) negotiations. An initiative to enhance regional security dialogues as suggest above could help lay the groundwork for assessing prerequisites for an actual WMD-free zone in the Middle East. The immediate focus, however, should be to support the 2012 conference in a way that builds confidence among Middle East states in the process itself.

On FMCT, the United States and Russia could explore two avenues. The first would be to promote transparency measures related to stockpiles of fissile material and/or those to build confidence that shutdown facilities (e.g. in Israel) are no longer operating with a view to designing verification for a later treaty. The second would be to explore the potential for an FMCT to ban national fissile material production facilities in favor of multinational approaches. This would build on support for regional fuel cycle approaches and efforts to find institutional arrangements to lessen the risk of Iran's enrichment capabilities.

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Finally, although U.S.-Russian cooperation on Middle East nuclear issues is likely to reap benefits for both energy and nonproliferation, the SuPR group should consider, at a later stage, drawing Chinese officials into such collaboration because of the growth of Chinese influence and interests in the region. In much the same way that Chinese cooperation is critical to obtaining sanctions on Iran, it will also be critical in developing a sustainable, equitable energy future.