

MESSAGE OF HRH PRINCE EL HASSAN BIN TALAL  
AT THE  
MEETING OF EXPERTS ON MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL SECURITY  
AND THE ELIMINATION OF WMD

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Impact of the Proliferation of WMD on the Stability  
of the Middle East

Dear friends:

It would have been a great pleasure to be with you in person today. Unfortunately, my overextended commitments precluded this. Instead, I have gratefully accepted the invitation of our host, Professor Cherif Bassiouni, to address your meeting.

We live in a region that is relatively less safe than other regions. We face all kinds of security threats. These threats result mainly from unresolved conflicts over territories and resources; from worsening economic situations arising from debt, poverty, and unemployment; from lack of democracy that is based on political pluralism; from extremist ideologies seeking to undermine the rule of law; from the widespread escalation of conventional military hardware; and last but not least, from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means.

In theory, the possession of certain types or quantities of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) undermines security. In the event of a crisis, some leaders might be tempted to use such weapons. An abrupt change of government might leave those weapons in less responsible and reliable hands. The feeling of being militarily superior, with the possession of WMD, could easily influence and even justify decisions to resort to armed conflicts as a means to resolve pending regional problems. Last, but most important, a nation that produces and possesses those weapons, even if it has no intent of using them, heightens anxiety among its neighbours and adversaries.

Greater awareness of the nature of the threat of super-terrorism since 11 September 2001, necessarily demands more serious consideration of the appropriate responses. Of these, the least innovative and least promising would be a familiar rehearsal of the benefits of global arms-control treaties. Not only are terrorists not party to these treaties; some states are also not parties to all of them; others are, but their signature is effectively worthless; and others even refuse to ratify amendments to the IAEA Protocol that would make possible international inspections effective enough to determine whether their adherence to NPT really means anything.

Weapons proliferation, both conventional and non-conventional, should therefore be viewed as a serious security threat, demanding the establishment of institutionalised mechanisms which would restrain the dissemination of potentially dangerous weapons technologies and deal with them. Arms control should thus strive to develop criteria and standards that guide policy across nations and over time in a consistent and uniform manner (B. Kellman, *Theory on Weapons Control*, 1995).

As you know, the strategic capability of Israel has driven a number of regional states to declare that some form of an in-kind deterrence should be developed or acquired. In addition, Israel's tactical capabilities and technological superiority have also accelerated the acquisition and production process of sophisticated conventional weapons and surface-to-surface missiles, which may be used as an alternative deterrent for WMD.

These processes and trends are likely to continue as more arms deals are being concluded. States of our region bought nearly half the \$40 billion worth of weapons sold abroad during 1996 alone (*The Jerusalem Post*, 15 October 1997 - IISS Report, London). Those funds could have been better spent on socio-economic development, where they are desperately needed.

As strategic objectives, this conventional arms race needs to be checked, and WMD and their delivery means must be eliminated from our region. Having said that, however, a major problem remains: how best to achieve these objectives? Through what processes? Under what conditions and criteria? And finally, subject to what timetable?

We should address these questions and perhaps many more so as to be able to promote educational and consensus-building efforts regarding the arms control issues as well as the spread of WMD.

Weapons control and disarmament negotiations are essential components of international diplomacy. If successful, they should enhance regional stability through reducing military threats and the risk of war breaking out. Such negotiations might also decelerate the regional arms race, reduce fears and tensions between adversaries, and stabilise military balances among states.

Arms control measures should encourage states to resort to peaceful means of resolving or managing conflicts, thereby conserving resources needed for economic and social development through reducing military expenditures. As a result, such means will create confidence, promote trust, minimise suspicions, and create better understanding among states.

In an address to RUSI, London, December 1996, I highlighted the fact that “one side-effect of the Gulf crisis has been the emergence of calls for new approaches to long-standing Middle East questions. New security structure, new regional order and new thinking in the Middle East have become increasingly familiar terms.” At the end of both world wars, parallel sentiments for a new world order emerged. As the history of the last century attests, blueprints unfortunately have never worked. A similar outcome in the case of the Middle East must now be avoided. But how? And what needs to be done?

I believe that the security of our region is the responsibility of states living in it. We must strive towards establishing a regional security structure to complement, not replace, bilateral and multilateral security arrangements among states in the region.

Experiences of other regions, however, show that success is a result of hard work and careful adherence to regional and international norms. We need to work equally hard and be equally sensitive to each other’s needs to ensure that a regional security process is established and developed. This would be in the vital interest of all the states in the region and beyond.

No two regions or situations are the same; so the design of cooperative work and its division of labour must adjust to the realities of each case with

high flexibility and creativity. It should be emphasised, however, that constructing a security regime is a painstaking process, but one which can bear fruit in the most unlikely of circumstances. Another factor is the importance of track-II diplomacy: it is critical in getting the dialogue process started and in sustaining it.

Observing and learning from the experiences of others, each region should create its own model to suit its own purposes. The Asia-Pacific region (ASEAN) was specifically offered the European model (OSCE) but declined it as being only partially successful, too institutionalised, too firmly grounded in common norms and values, and overly-ambitious.

Ultimately the impetus for establishing a regional security regime must come from within the region itself. However, outside powers can help, and in some instances they are even essential. The United States, in particular, could play a vital role in this endeavour; so could the European Union.

Furthermore, any sub-regional or regional security arrangements must be based on an agreeable set of principles. Examples of such principles were adopted by the plenary at your Cairo meeting, December 1996. Those were referred to as *Fifteen Requirements*. A footnote to that annex suggested that these requirements need further elaboration. In this context, therefore, may I suggest to you that these principles could be further developed into some security code of conduct and as part of a more comprehensive code of conduct for the whole region.

According to a study on the security considerations of the states in the Middle East, the authorities of the states concerned perceive the existence and the danger of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as a growing threat. This perception has been the subject of successive declarations by the officials of these states. Although the modalities suggested for overcoming that threat exhibit differences, the various authorities share a common view regarding the necessity of dealing with this threat within the context of a Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East (Study by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, No. 24, 1996).

As you know, “in the context of a comprehensive, lasting and stable peace, characterised by the renunciation of the use of force, and by reconciliation and goodwill,” both Jordan and Israel are committed to work jointly “towards establishing a Middle East free from weapons of mass

destruction, both conventional and non-conventional” (Article 4, Para 7-b of the Jordan-Israel Treaty of Peace).

Along somewhat similar lines of thought, in an address to the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly on 29 September 1997, Mr. David Levy, the then Israeli foreign minister, said, and I quote: “After the establishment of peace treaties between Israel and every country of the region, it will be possible to bring about the establishment of a regional security system, which would provide multilateral and shared solutions to the range of security problems in our region, including a mutually and effectively verifiable Middle East: of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.” [End of quote.]

Meanwhile, and as reflected by your Mission Statement, January 15, 1996, “a security regime establishing a Middle East zone free of WMD as one of its elements is essential for reducing the risk of war. The security regime should aim at preventing the proliferation of proscribed weapons, improving relations among participating states, and contributing to the process of regional and international disarmament.”

At the same time, I believe that there is a real need for a holistic approach to security to encompass the political, economic, environmental, social, and spiritual dimensions. Such reconceptualisation would be vital for regional stability, cooperation, and eventual integration. The chance still exists to make order out of potential chaos due to the unpredictability and uncertainty of future developments. Clearly, an on-going dialogue can help to counter all causes of instability in our region. And as has always been emphasised: “dialogue might not solve all problems; but it is impossible to solve any problem without dialogue.”

To this end, please allow me to express my deep appreciation to all of you as a “Group of Experts on Arms Control and Regional Security.” The Middle East is in a particularly dangerous and volatile state. Please allow me to call upon you all to further explore new means and approaches with the aim of designing and building institutions which would be vital for long-term stability and security in the region.

Your efforts should complement those of the international community to face the challenges posed by the proliferation of WMD: “mending strategic relations to reduce WMD dangers; stopping and reversing the

proliferation of WMD; and developing the architecture of, and taking new initiatives for, WMD disarmament.”

May I wish you all a very interesting and fruitful dialogue. Thank you.