From Europe’s Past to the Middle East’s Future:
The Constitutive Purpose of Forward Analogies in International Security*

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Abstract

Why do international security experts and policymakers draw analogies between various contexts? Do they use analogies to help them better predict the future consequences of their actions? Or do they employ analogies for other purposes? This article analyzes how policymakers and experts draw on “forward analogies” (i.e. analogies between observed causal relations and expected causal relations) to advance diplomatic negotiations in a particularly hard context: the deliberations of the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Free Zone in the Middle East. In situations in which diplomacy is blocked by the unwillingness of parties to start negotiations, this article claims that forward analogies can not only serve a predictive purpose, but also a constitutive purpose: analogies help “constitute” the reality of regional orders (such as the “Middle East”) when their ontological status as objects of deliberation and intervention is problematic. Yet, their successful operation depends on their ability to respect pre-existing cultural scripts and cultural taboos. Furthermore, their constitutive effect remains circumscribed to specific contexts in which forward-looking discussions are clearly distinguished from official negotiations. By highlighting the cultural embeddedness of forward analogies, this article draws upon developments in cultural sociology to advance the burgeoning literature on future-oriented practices in international relations.
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“We live in an age when many of the world’s regions, once ravaged by war, are now coming together. We see this above all in Europe… The results are obvious: peace and security, prosperity, better quality of life. Increasingly, the Middle East stands out, but not in the way that should make any of us proud. Our challenge – our opportunity – is to begin the process of making the Middle East a region, not just in the geographic sense, but in the political, economic and indeed, the human sense as well.”


It is quite common for policymakers to present the accomplishments of others as models that their fellow citizens should emulate, especially when their own nation is embroiled in a dramatic and hopeless situation. Before the crisis of the Euro-zone, “Europe” offered to other regions a model of regional order that they could imitate. In the mid-1990s, James Baker told the participants in the Arab-Israeli peace process (or “Madrid process,” as it started in Madrid) that they should emulate the process that started in Europe in the mid-1970s and which forced the military powers in Eastern and Western Europe to reduce their weapons systems in a coordinated and verifiable fashion – the so-called “Helsinki process,” which led from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) held in 1973 in Helsinki to the adoption of arms reduction and peace treaties in Europe in 1990 (when the Cold War ended). For peace to happen in the Middle East, Baker and others believed that policymakers of the region needed to use their knowledge of the foreign European past to break away from their own history and invent a future for themselves.

This reference to Europe’s past to map out a brighter future for the Middle East is not exceptional within security communities. Over a period of five years, from 2008 until 2014, I have participated in more than a dozen of track-II (semi-official) meetings which have tried to revive the idea of constructing a Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Free Zone in the

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2 Diplomats had in mind the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty (Feldman and Toukan, 1997:82).
Middle East (hereafter, the Zone). When participating in and organizing such events, I was struck to see that the use of such analogies between Europe’s past and the Middle East’s future still elicited a very positive response from the participants and fueled constructive dialogue among invitees from the Middle East. During these meetings, the analogy that I (and others) have used was not that between the “Helsinki process” and the Middle East’s future Zone, but between the latter and the European Community of Atomic Energy (Euratom). This analogy may have seemed quite inappropriate to some, as Euratom initially served to pool Western Europe’s nuclear technologies for both military and peaceful purposes (Mallard 2014), but Euratom did put in place the first (and only) existing regional system of control of nuclear activities—hence, its relevance for the future Zone in the Middle East (Mallard, 2008; Mallard and Foradori 2014).

Even though this analogy makes sense in some limited fashion, the positive reaction from Middle Eastern policymakers was originally puzzling to me. As a reader of post-colonial scholarship (Said, 1979), I was expecting that references to Europe’s past would be taken to reflect long-held (and misplaced) Euro-centric beliefs about the central importance of Europe in world history, and I was careful not to say that policymakers should copy and paste Europe’s past to sketch the Middle East’s future. Still, by presenting Europe as a possible template, my efforts could be interpreted as implying that the knowledge of Europe’s past could be heuristically superior to that of other regions—a bias strongly entrenched in Western social sciences (Chakrabarty 2000). This implied superiority of Europe over other regions (like Asia, or Latin America) disturbed me, but the deep interest I sensed from participants of the region encouraged me to continue building on this analogy. The question remained as to why participants from the Middle East seemed interested in learning more about Europe’s past, and why they found epistemic practicality in deploying the analogy between Europe’s past and the Middle East’s future.

One obvious hypothesis is that participants from the Middle East were in fact not “learning” anything—or that the cognitive payoffs were not what mattered to them—, but that they were interested in traveling to nice locations, or in accumulating social capital and new connections, which helped them strengthen their position within their domestic field of power (Bourdieu, 1988). The connections which the participants in the track-II meetings organized on the Zone in the 1990s made with U.S. political and academic elites during these
meetings have certainly benefitted their careers – in manners similar to the positive influence of transnational connections made by the “compradores” of Latin America as described by Yves Dezalay and Bryant Garth (2002). Participants to the meetings that James Baker helped organize in the 1990s have since become Ambassadors in such Western capitals as Washington and London, as well as Ministers of Foreign Affairs in their own country: participation in these track-II meetings helped them play these classical “double games” (Dezalay and Garth, 2002) by which skilled professionals accumulate capital both in the academic and the political fields.

But cultural sociologists who advance a “strong program” for the study of culture (Alexander and Smith 2002) have long pointed to the problems associated with such reductionist approaches to culture: by refusing to take into account the autonomy of culture, reductionist approaches fail to explain when cultural scripts successfully work to produce social and political effects and effectively change broader social structures—and when they don’t. Here, such a cynical reading also contradicted my first-hand experience, which offered numerous examples that participants emphasized the cognitive payoffs of drawing analogies between Europe’s past and non-European futures. I witnessed that from one meeting to the next, participants from the Middle East also incorporated (selectively) some of the observations from Euratom’s past that they considered relevant to their vision of the future Zone in the Middle East. More generally, the use of such analogies in social performances thus needs to be analyzed as a cultural phenomenon, whose autonomy is to be ascertained and explained. Indeed, “projected futures are crucial for any discussion of action and agency” (Tavory and Eliasoph 2013:910), and forward analogies are but one among many forms by which participants to social performances enact the “potentialities” (Taussig, Hoeyer and Helmreich, 2013) contained in the present.

This article thus seeks to respond to the following questions: For what purposes do foreign policy practitioners use analogies between their region and others? Do they try to extract predictions by applying knowledge of a foreign past to their own case? Or do forward analogies serve other purposes? If so, when and how do they decide that forward analogies have been successful? How do these analogies help them navigate and play with broader

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3 See for instance the differences between the proposals put forward by the Chairman of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, Mohammed Shaker (2010, 2014), before and after he participated to various workshops on Euratom and the Zone.
cultural scripts and taboos? To answer these questions, I only indirectly draw on my first-hand experienced during the meetings I witnessed: even if my participation in track-II discussions would only prohibit indexation of exchanges between participants to their real identity (according to the Chatham House rules), in the context of this article, I will use material from the published record in general, and second-hand accounts of the discussions of the Zone in the Middle East conducted by diplomats/scholars in the 1990s in particular – some of whom still met in track-II discussions of the Zone, in which I took part in the late 2000s and early 2010s. My own participation in track-II discussions is thus strictly limited to generate ideas and hypotheses, but not to validate my claims.

By answering this set of questions, this article participates in shifting the focus of cultural “sociologists [who] have concentrated more on the norms governing narrative’s content than the norms governing its use or its evaluation.” (Poletta et al., 2011:110) In this article, I treat future projections as “social performances that are interactively constructed, institutionally regulated, and assessed by their audiences in relation to hierarchies of discursive credibility.” (Poletta et al., 2011:110) I thus analyze the cultural norms and institutional regulations that are placed upon the use of such “narratives” (Labov and Waletzki 1967)—broadly conceived as articulations between a past, present and future—, which guide the evaluation of their verisimilitude and desirability (Mische 2009). In so doing, I study how participants in such “social performances” (Alexander 2004) navigate between pre-existing sets of scripts and taboos; and how they respect (or subvert) the codes of etiquette that determine in which contexts they can or cannot appropriately deploy certain futures as desirable outcomes of their action.

In the rest of this article, I will first discuss how analogies – in particular, “forward analogies” – differ from metaphors and other techniques that foreign policymakers use to think about the future. In the first section, I will therefore define the specificity of what I call “forward analogies” compared to other techniques described by scholars of anticipatory knowledge practices (Aradau and Van Munster, 2011). Second, I will describe how analogies between Europe and the Middle East were used during the “Madrid process” to solve a specific diplomatic conundrum (a classical chicken-and-egg problem), which plagued Arab-Israeli deliberations about “their” region: although the definition of a future regional order in which each party found an acceptable role for itself was key to the normalization of their
relationship (Barnett, 1998), the latter was necessary before they could engage in the process of shaping that regional order. Forward analogies established the commonality between “Europe” and the “Middle East” (the fact that both ontologies could be seen as regions); at the same time participants to these meetings continued to underline the differences between the future “Middle East” and expert constructions of Europe’s past. The reference to Europe thus never worked as a metaphor. Third, I will investigate the cultural embeddedness of such forward analogies in broader discursive norms and taboos, by showing how analogies allowed experts to carefully avoid challenging the taboo prohibition on Israel’s nuclear weapons program. Although differences between the Middle East and Europe were generally highlighted, the specific story of each region’s nuclear history remained black-boxed, or hidden from discussion. Forward analogies thus allowed policymakers to talk about acceptable roadmaps and plans for their region, without mentioning their contentious past. Fourth, and in contradistinction to the fictional context of track-II meetings, I will show that as soon as the context of the conversation shifted from an informal to an official scene, the nuclear specificities of the Middle East’s past resurfaced. Then, the use of such an analogy stopped functioning as a scenario-making exercise: the analogy lost its constitutive power and the talks ended.

1. Forward Analogies, Metaphors and Simulations

Prudential and Conjectural Forms of Reasoning

A burgeoning scholarship has been recently developed on the instruments by which anticipatory knowledge is produced within international security communities of experts (Lakoff, 2007; Clarke, 2007; Gibson, 2011a; Guilhot, 2011; Aradau and Van Munster, 2011; Andersson, 2012; Colonosmos, 2014; Andersson and Egle 2015). This new literature is deeply rooted in the works of constructivist scholars of knowledge formation who have insisted that a variety of “epistemic cultures” (Knorr Cetina, 1999; Hacking, 2004) can be found across and within scientific communities. The attention paid to various styles of reasoning allows these scholars to move beyond the Foucaultian studies of

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4 By doing so, they have distanced themselves from other sociologists of expert communities inspired by Pierre Bourdieu (Dezalay and Garth, 2002; Poulit, 2008; Bigo, 2005; Stampnitzky, 2013), who focus on processes of institutionalization, social capital transmission and transnational network formation.
“governmentality,” (Foucault, 2009) which have tended to focus on one specific style of reasoning about the future (risk-based approaches), and one purpose served by that style (a predictive one). This style of reasoning, which Aradau and van Munster (2011:14, 31) call the “prudential” scientific style, posits the existence of general categories by which events are classified and their occurrence quantified. This prudential style of reasoning has been particularly prevalent within professions that have generated new predictive models to compute probabilities of risky events (Beck, 1992; Porter, 1995), for instance in the fields of insurance and finance.

Evidently, the use of analogies such as those between Europe and the Middle East does not fall within the “prudential” style of reasoning, as analogies build relations between only two cases. Thus, their use in policymaking worlds cannot be associated with the increasing importance of the “large numbers” (Desrosières 1993). The use of analogies rather falls within the realm of what Ginzburg (1979) as well as Aradau and van Munster (2011:14, 31) call “conjectural” knowledge practices. These conjectural modes of reasoning consist in gathering a wide range of disparate evidence, which is analyzed for its incongruence and singularity, and which is always placed within a context that is assumed to be historically specific. An analogy respects the irreducibility of each context. Each of the two cases that form the analogy is analyzed as a whole, and in ways that are very similar to what political scientists have called the “holistic approach” to the practice of paired comparison (Ragin, 1989). In this conjectural style of reasoning, neither of the two cases can be reduced to the illustration of a general (and tranhistorical) category, in contra-distinction with the prudential mode of reasoning already mentioned.

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Insert Figure 1: Historical and Forward Analogies
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In fact, the analogy is a relation of similitude drawn between a set of relations within two cases, not between two cases (as a metaphor is). For instance, as is illustrated in the graphic above (figure 1), a “historical analogy” relates four different observable (hence past) moments in two different contexts. The analogy makes a claim about the observed similitude between the cases based on the similarity of the relations between the two moments within each case. Similarly, what I call a “forward analogy” underlines the assumed relation of
similitude between two cases in different temporalities (in one case, the two moments are in the past; in the other case, one moment is past/present and the other is located in the future).

**Analogies and Metaphors**

Analogies differ from metaphors, and their purpose also differs. Historical metaphors have been quite commonly used in the field of international security, especially for their predictive purposes. For instance, scholars have established that the reference to “Munich” (e.g. the rather mild Western reaction to the invasion of Austria by Hitler in 1938) has been one of the most common sources for the production of predictions by U.S. policymakers (May, 1973; Neustadt and May, 1986; Khong, 1992): most of the time, the reference to Munich served to justify military action rather than diplomatic (in)action, as the lesson that U.S. policymakers have drawn from Munich was that Hitler could have been stopped if the British and French had reacted to the Anschluss with military force.\(^5\) This predictive use of history has been emphasized time and again in the literature on “learning from history” (Jervis, 1976; Khong, 1992:6; Levy, 1994; Treverton, 1993; Garofano, 2004; Pelopidas, 2011), although many of these authors have cautioned that policymakers often draw the “wrong” predictions from the observation of the past (Neustadt, 1973; Jervis, 1976; Kohng, 1992). Indeed, those who use metaphors for predictive purposes have a tendency to overestimate the likelihood that certain chains of actions will repeat themselves over time. Policymakers often miss when they draw historical analogies,\(^6\) or rather, when they use analogies as “metaphors” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), in the sense that they overemphasize the common points and ignore differences. As George Lakoff and Clark Johnson (1980: 13) note, in practice, the metaphor has a tendency to substitute itself for the object it is supposed to represent, although, as they write, the metaphorical substitution is “partial, not total: if it were total, one concept would actually be the other, not merely understood in terms of it.” Then, it is far from certain that the use of metaphors produces good predictions.

In contrast to previous authors, I argue that analogies are not used primarily for a “predictive” purpose, but rather for a “constitutive” purpose (Mallard and Lakoff, 2011:340; Pénet and Mallard 2014), in the sense that analogies can turn an ontologically uncertain

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\(^5\) The same lesson is referenced by Israeli policymakers (Heller, 1994:100).

\(^6\) Some, however, argue that historical references just serve ex-post window-dressing purposes and have little influence on the decision-making process (Jervis 1976).
future into an object of knowledge and intervention. Rather than looking (predictively) for the probable causes of an unlikely event, “conjectural” reasoning seeks to make sense of the reality of a new event. As Aradau and van Munster (2011:2) write, in the conjectural style of reasoning, “the cause of the event often remains unknown and unknowable,” as well as the probability of its occurrence. In other words, when Middle Eastern policymakers learn what Europe’s past consists of, they do not mostly seek to fine-tune their predictions about the likelihood that the same actions as those which were decided in Europe’s past would lead to the same outcomes in the Middle East. What matters to them is not so much to find out the probability of the occurrence of future states of the world, or the complete chain of events that may lead to it, but rather, to imagine the world created by a major change, by drawing on the similarities and differences between the envisioned world and a similar but quite different case. Projecting Europe’s past onto the Middle East’s future produces meaning when the exercise allows participants to infer “the repercussions, often contrary to intentions, ‘back from’ such projected futures to the production and transformation of social structures” (Mische 2009:695)—in contrast to the Great Plans often studied by anthropologists of development (Scott 1998).

Narrative creativity rather than historical accuracy or predictive capacity, is thus the criterion that one uses to evaluate the worth of analogies: the latter do not work as “working hypotheses” but as “fictions,” as “a fiction differs from a hypothesis because the latter is directed toward reality and demands verification, whereas the fiction induces only an illusion of understanding,” (Riles 2010: 802) and the preservation of that illusion is what can sometimes keep a dialogue moving forward. Thus, what Annelise Riles (2010: 802) writes about the use of “placeholders” and fictions may be also true about the use of analogies by foreign policymakers: those policymakers who draw on analogies (rather than metaphors) between Europe’s past and the possible futures of the Middle East may not really know how similar or different the “placeholder” (here, Europe’s past) is from the reality for which it substitutes (the Middle East’s future). For them, the analogy between the Middle East and Europe is just a way to consider the two cases as ontologies of the same kind: the explication of the differences between otherwise commensurate cases then serves as the focal point of their discussion and thus allows the talks to go on by focusing discussions on a shared narrative—in a context in which the past is the object of multiple and conflicting narratives,
as in the case of the Middle East. These fictions are thus productive precisely because their fictionality is acknowledged, reflected upon, rather than hidden or forgotten. This reflexivity thus differentiates the use of forward analogies from the cultural tendency to focus attention on “best-case specimens” (Cerulo 2006:9), which is grounded on practices of “eclipsing” (e.g. to render the worst scenarios invisible), “clouding” (e.g. to keep the worst vague), and “recasting” (e.g. to redefine the worst as not so bad) (Cerulo 2006:14). Participants to track-II meetings may not use analogies to re-cast their past in a positive fashion, or eclipse the most deadly episodes in their history, but to reinforce the shared feeling that their discussion takes place in a bubble of suspended action, “as if” their discussion was not about their Middle East, but about a fictional Middle East divorced from its past and re-attached to the past of another region.

The Cultural and Contextual Embeddedness of Successful Forward Analogies

Although the use of forward analogies is performative in the sense that analogies serve the purpose of giving an (ephemeral) existence to an ontology that, if not discussed within the context of a fictional game would otherwise not be present, broader cultural and discursive rules guide the dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959) or “mise-en-scène” (Alexander, 2004) of the talks in which such futures are envisioned. Forward analogies work, or not, depending on their complicity with broader discursive plans. Indeed, as creative as individuals may be, they also have to navigate between pre-existing sets of scripts, narratives and accepted utopias, which determine whether their use of analogies can achieve narrative practicality. In other words, successful performances not only mobilize analogies, but also “plans,” “roadmaps” and other culturally accepted visions of the long-term. Or as Jeffrey Alexander (2004:530) writes, in such theatrical performances as those “constructed by the performative imagination, background and foreground symbols are structured by codes that provide analogies and antipathies and by narratives that provide chronologies.”

Alexander’s (2004) notion of “social performance” —rather than “performativity” (Muniesa and Callon 2007)—captures the fact that dramaturgical rules are structured by broader institutional norms, as well as they work as structuring rules for the coordination of

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7 Gibson (2011b) makes a similar point about the “speech norms” and “group styles” (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003) in which deliberations about the US response to the Cuban Missile Crisis took place.
action among defused communities of interpreters and role players. Looking at the cultural embeddedness of analogical reasoning thus requires us to distinguish between various dimensions of “future talk” (Gibson 2011). These levels may include all three modes of “future-coordination” (“protentions,”8 “trajectories” and “plans”), which Iddo Tavory and Nina Eliasoph (2013) distinguish according to scope and function—and to a large extent, track-II meetings could be interesting sites to analyze how participants rely on such protentions (Gibson 2011a) to anticipate when to speak and when to stay silent—,9 but the articulation between protention and forward analogies is not going to be at the center of my analysis.10 Rather, this article focuses on the relation between forward analogies and “plans,” which are constituted by these broad narratives, institutional norms and utopian images that guide, here, how the Middle’s past, present and future are usually staged in public. The positive complicity between the use of forward analogies and broader plans for the region, the article claims, is the outcome of the skilled labor by participants to track-II meeting, who try to make sure that specific taboos regarding the Middle East’s past and present are avoided, even in these informal settings. If the analogy between Europe and the Middle East foregrounded visions of the region’s past and future that were unspeakable in the Middle East—like Israel’s nuclear past and its incorporation in the accepted “roadmaps” for peace in the region (Cohen 2010)—, its narrative creativity would be seriously questioned even during informal talks. Pointing to the relation between plans and forward analogies thus underlines the fact that analogies do not operate in a cultural vacuum. Analogies are useful if they help participants navigate complex discursive and political constrains that exist independently of the participants’ intentions. They matter for what they allow participants to talk about and for what that they allow participants not to mention—the cultural taboos that structure nations’ identities (Savelsberg and King 2005).

At last, this article questions the link between forward analogies and context: the scene in which such analogies become focal points matters, as a shift in context—from

8 Protention is an interesting aspect of conversations that needs analysis, as showed by many studies inspired by ethno-methodology since Garfinkel (1967).
9 Indeed, track-II meetings allow all participants to see how diplomats mobilize real-life negotiating skills in unofficial talks—an experience which can teach lessons about the interactional dynamics that could occur if these proposals were tabled for real. The complicity between protention and trajectory, which is the focus of Bourdieu’s field theory (Tavory and Eliasoph 2013:919), could also be interesting to analyze.
10 Doing so would require the kind of minute data used for instance in Gibson’s (2011a) study of the Missile Cuban Crisis, which he based on audio-recordings of the conversations between experts. The
informal to official talks for instance—is likely to change the criteria by which the usefulness of such analogies are assessed. Whereas narrative creativity might be valued over verisimilitude in track-II meetings, prudent realism might trump creativity in official negotiations. Here, as soon as the analogy moves to official diplomatic forums, the veracity and plausibility of the assumed relation of similitude between two sets of relations (within the past of Europe and within the future history of the Middle East), will be officially questioned, tested, and criticized. Within real-life negotiations, the fiction may not be able to resist the test of historical accuracy, and the analogy may lose its performative effects, especially if it clashes with common narratives about the Middle East’s past, present and future. This is why diplomats may discuss the utility of forward analogies only to the extent that they know—and routinely gesture at the fact—that they are being discussed for the sake of the exercise, despite being unrealistic.

2. To Talk or Not To Talk? How Diplomats Can Do Both

An Opportunity to Learn: The Political Usefulness of Learning Exercises

Scholars have underlined how future-projections can usefully serve to script collective conversations (Mallard and Lakoff 2007; Tavory and Eliasoph 2013): for instance, when scenario-making exercises make it possible to assemble an unlikely performance, with participants whose identity is such that they are unlikely to engage in an interaction. Gathering in the same room a negotiator from Iran, an official of the Israeli Atomic energy commission, and an Egyptian diplomat—as occurred in track-II talks in which I participated—may seem impossible in the context of official negotiations, but it becomes possible if the purpose is “academic” and if conveners claim that the purpose of the conference is to “learn from Europe’s past.” Such was the model of track-II meetings that the United States and the Soviet Union proposed to Iraq’s regional neighbors after the first Iraq war that followed the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein in 1990. Indeed, the Iraq war made them realize at least two things: that they needed to more actively pursue their nuclear nonproliferation efforts in the Middle East, as they realized that Saddam Hussein had been much closer to obtaining nuclear weapons than anyone had realized; and that international cooperation between the two Super-Powers could reshape the contours of the Middle East.
Thus, after 1991, U.S. and Soviet policymakers decided that it was time to propose the same “confidence building measures of the sort we developed with the Soviets in Europe [to] be pursued between Israel and her Arab neighbors [in order] to reduce the risk of war and miscalculation and to lay the basis for their political engagement” (cited in Reich, 1994:131). Some politicians from the Middle East echoed these calls, like the Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres who entertained “the hope that the Middle East’s future w[ould] duplicate Europe’s past – where modest experiments in cooperation snowballed into greater interdependence and nation-building” (Barnett, 1998:231). As the peace process continued from 1992 to 1995, the U.S. and Russia thus institutionalized a working group under the name “the Arms Control and Regional Security” (ACRS), which comprised experts from Israel as well as the thirteen Arab states which had taken part in the Madrid Peace process (excluding Syria and Iran).

The dramaturgy that followed during ACRS conferences allowed participants to deny that they had participated in any “official” negotiations with warring states on each side of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The ACRS conferences were almost like “seminars by American diplomats who had been involved in East-West arms control negotiations, to present the concepts and ideas” (Krause 1994:278). As the Jordanian delegation head, Abdullah Toukan said, initially the talks were “basically a seminar for mutual familiarization of terms in the field” of arms control “based on the European example,” (cited in Krause, 1994:289) which had a fictional and academic quality. The study of Europe’s past gave Arab and Israeli foreign policy makers some measure of plausible deniability: if asked, they could respond that no, they were not engaged in official inter-state negotiations of “their” own regional security, they were only learning which confidence building measures that Europeans had implemented in the past. Thus, the ACRS Working Group held several workshops to learn about European procedures: one on verification of disarmament measures (Egypt, July 1993); a seminar on maritime confidence building measures to avoid accidental escalation led by Canada (Nova Scotia, September 1993); one on exchange of military information about arms procurement and doctrines (Turkey, October 1993); as well as a direct observation of the on-site inspection procedures adopted by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in the U.K. and in Denmark and the declaratory confidence-building measures of the
In these meetings, U.S., European and Soviet diplomats acted as professors, and diplomats from the Middle East as students, each of them playing a role (student vs. diplomat) that allowed them to deny that any inter-state negotiation over the contours of a peaceful Middle East had started. This role-shifting strategy unblocked conversations that were otherwise impossible to hold on a public stage.

For regional players, the exercises in ACRS were thus just scenario-making exercises and not diplomatic negotiations. Most participating states (Reich 1994:226), including Israel, “attended reluctantly” the real diplomatic conference in Madrid that started the peace process in October 1991 (Barnett 1998:221). And as far as participation in ACRS was concerned, as noticed by Shai Feldman (1997b:26), a leading Israeli ACRS participant, the Israelis were very careful not to claim that they had engaged in official discussions because “the Israeli government seems to believe that once discussions are initiated, it is difficult to ensure that they do not ‘slip’ into negotiations,” which is why “Israel prefers to avoid such discussions altogether.” During the conferences, ACRS experts thus emphatically drew a boundary between their effort to learn Europe’s past, and the diplomatic negotiation of the great plans proposed for the Middle East, a region in which most state actors across the Arab-Israeli divide (with the rare exception of Egypt and Israel since 1979) did not even recognize the legitimate existence or territorial boundaries of the other side.

A Forward Analogy, Not a Metaphor

ACRS participants used the comparison between Europe’s past and the Middle East’s future as an analogy rather than as a metaphor: they did not believe that the European precedent could be a road map to be copied, nor did they completely blackbox differences

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11 For an overview of how ACRS advanced compared to other working groups (like Economic Development), see Solingen (2000), or Jones (1997); and on other transnational arms control communities, see Adler (1992).

12 Real negotiations actually occurred in the background, leading for instance to the joint Israeli-Jordanian declaration in 1993 (Feldman, 1997a:9), and their 1994 bilateral peace treaty, which called both parties to enlarge their talks to regional actors by committing “themselves to the creation, in the Middle East, of a Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Middle East (CSCME),” (art. 4.1.B), modeled after the European precedent, http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/peacetreaty.html.

13 The United States and Russia organized a series of conferences convened in Moscow (January 1992, September 1992) and in Washington (May 1992, September 1992) to assess the lessons of Europe for the Middle East.

14 It was only after the September 1993 Oslo agreements, by which Israel recognized a Palestinian interlocutor, and after the peace treaty signed between Israel and Jordan in 1994, that some normalization between some of the states involved occurred without sanction (Barnett 1998).
between the two contexts; quite the contrary. For instance, ACRS participants consistently repeated that the Middle East’s security problems were more acute than those encountered by Europeans in the past. For them, the main obstacle they needed to overcome was that they could not officially recognize each other’s existence: Arab states in the Middle East had to agree that the “Middle East” would include a non-Arab state like Israel, and Israel had to agree to settle some territorial claims with Arab states, before they could even start discussing their state’s present-day doctrines and visions of the regional order into objects of deliberation (and of possible transformation). Although European historians could argue that the issue of West Germany’s recognition by the Soviets was at least as problematic as that of Israel by the Arab states, Feldman and Toukan (1997:82) reiterated that “the multilateral process [of] the ACRS discussions was bound to be more complicated than the bilateral East-West process,” because, they claimed, European states had been able to maintain diplomatic representation and mechanisms of inter-state recognition throughout the Cold War.\(^\text{15}\) The point here is not to dispute the historical validity of this statement, but to note that ACRS participants underlined the differences between the two contexts rather than their similitude. Indeed, all ACRS experts agreed on the somewhat casual assessment that “in Europe, unlike the Middle East, there were no major territorial questions to resolve by the time of the CSCE, nor were there issues related to the existence of the parties,\(^\text{16}\) quite unlike the case of Israel or the Palestinians” (Ben-Dor and Dewitt, 1994:6). This claim served a useful purpose: making the case that their peace was harder to reach than it had been for Europeans to settle the Cold War, ACRS participants deflected the criticism they expected to receive from the U.S. officials if they proved unable to convince their governments to agree on limited confidence-building measures.

From this apparently shared diagnosis, ACRS participants also drew the conclusion that the solutions to be applied in the Middle East would be different from those adopted in Europe, even though the overall logic may seem similar. I will only cite two of the differences that they stressed: the roles of confidence-building measures and human rights provisions. First, regarding the place of confidence-building measures, ACRS experts

\(^{15}\) For instance, as Brynen (1994:53) writes, “the primary purpose of confidence building measures in Europe in the 1980s was to stabilize the postwar territorial status quo,” whereas, “in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict [or in the Syrian-Israeli conflict], the reverse is true.” – see also Krause (1994:270).

\(^{16}\) The exception was Eastern Germany, which no Western state recognized as a state.
stressed that in Europe it had seemed wise to start with “operational” confidence-building measures (e.g. those which aimed at increasing communication and transparency over military doctrines), as the latter made it more likely that “structural” confidence building measures (e.g. those legally-binding measures which seek to cap the number of weapons and prohibit either the production or use of WMDs) would latter be adopted and implemented (Gera, 1994:149; Heller, 1994:105). At the same time as they “learnt” the lesson that one had preceded (and caused) the other in Europe, they emphasized that such a progression would not work in the Middle East. Indeed, Alan Dowty (1994:72) writes, participants believed that in the Middle East, transparent communication of military doctrines could actually prove counter-productive: whereas “demonstration of nonviolent intent was relatively noncontroversial” in Europe in the 1970s (a statement whose historical validity might be taken with a grain of salt), “since neither side intended to initiate military action… and the task was [thus] to guarantee to each an accurate perception of the other’s intentions,” in contrast, in the Middle East, diplomats might find that “closer acquaintance might show that the hostile intent is real, and goes beyond prudent defense against possible attacks,” which would make improved communication counter-productive. Thus, even if ACRS experts claimed some of these confidence-building measures could be a good idea in the abstract – like, in 1994, the establishment of a communications network to inform neighbors of military exercises (Feldman, 1997a:10) –, they emphasized Middle Eastern “exceptionalism.”

Second, regarding the place of human rights provisions, ACRS experts insisted on the impossibility of directly transposing the European experience in human rights regulation onto the Middle Eastern scene. One of the main pillars of the Helsinki agreement of 1975 stated that the defense of human rights is not a purely domestic concern but that it entails an international security dimension (Ben-Dor and Dewitt, 1994:17). Seeing the impressive progress in the drafting process subsequent to the 1993 ACRS meeting in Cairo, Saudi Arabia pressed other participants during the next meeting in Doha (May, 1994) to eliminate all references to human rights issues in the final text of the Declaration of Principles that the parties to the ACRS adopted (Feldman, 1997a:11). As most participants in, and observers of,

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17 In fact, this widely held belief that “operational” measures came first was actually a historical post-hoc reconstruction of the Helsinki process (Kremenyuk 1994:250).
18 For instance, among the many authors who emphasize the “significant differences” between the European and Middle Eastern context, see Brynen (1994:55); Gera (1994:160); Krause (1994:271).
19 But they did not look for an exact probability of such a relation of causality.
the ACRS process emphasized, “it [was] obvious that transplanting a Western term born in very specific – and probably unique – circumstances in Europe to other areas of the world [was] a very hazardous enterprise,” (Ben Dor and Dewitt, 1994:6) and ACRS experts were convinced that studying the European past with the goal of copying it in this instance would not help them turn uncertainties into calculable risks; rather, they believed that if Middle Eastern states copied Europe’s past, especially as far as human rights were concerned, they would only create new sources of incalculable uncertainty. Saudi Arabia had no trouble convincing other parties that the inclusion of human rights provision in the Final ACRS Declaration would allow neighbors to meddle in legislation regarding discrimination against religious and/or ethnic minorities, which all states in the region (both Arab states and Israel) frame as “domestic issues.”20 As a result, the Final Declaration included no mention of Europe’s precedent of defending human rights.21

These two examples are emblematic of the way the forward analogy between Europe and the Middle East functioned in the rhetoric of ACRS experts: the prediction extracted from the historical reconstruction of the European case was affirmed in general at the same time as its validity was denied for the Middle East. Thus, at no time, the difference between the two contexts was suppressed, buried or black-boxed, as experts do when they use a metaphor (like “Munich”) to think through a new situation. In fact, this emphasis on the Middle East’s exceptionalism might be related to the logical contradiction between the two imperatives placed upon ACRS participants (to stop thinking that the “Middle East” could not be turned into a peaceful region, and to remain aware of the implausibility of progress toward peace in their region). This “double bind” (Bateson, 1972) reflected the contradictions in the diplomats’ own position: they could not present themselves as “negotiators” mandated by a state; but in fact, they did negotiate not just confidence building measures but a broader road map toward a Zone specific to the Middle East.22 And, as psychologists write about these situations, the only way to escape the double bind is for the individuals not to stress

20 The participants in ACRS did not explain why the Soviets failed to anticipate the consequences of such a clause among Polish and Hungarian dissidents, who could then voice their concerns for human rights in Eastern Europe (Ben-Dor and Dewitt, 1994:17).
21 Among the relevant differences between Europe and the Middle East, the “political and cultural differences,” (Ben-Dor and Dewitt, 1994:6; but also Feldman and Toukan, 1997:84) ranked high.
22 For Bateson (1972:206-7) a “double bind” takes the form of a primary negative injunction (of the form: ‘do not do this’); complemented by a positive injunction (‘do that’), which contradicts the first one; to which is added a third injunction (of the form ‘stay there’), which makes it impossible to escape the tensions.
logical links (predictive relations of causality on the form ‘if you do this, that will happen’), but rather, to suggest an intention to continue communicating despite the apparent contradictory injunctions (Wagner, 1978:790).

3. **Cultural Taboos and Diplomatic Discussions: The Complicity of Forward Analogies with Broader Discursive Norms**

The main success of the ACRS group was not “to learn” from past foreign experience so as to turn uncertainties into calculable risks, but rather, to prove the possibility that a transnational forum could organize (non)discussions about a “Middle East” (one defined by both its difference and similitude with Europe) between Arab and Israeli experts. Judged from the point of view of narrative creativity, the use of the analogy was a real success. In late 1993, as Shai Feldman (1997a:14) writes, “the array of activities conducted in the [ACRS] framework was unprecedented and extraordinary... and the exercise itself was an important confidence building measure, since it provided opportunities for a growing number of Israeli and Arab military personnel and government officials to interact informally.” A proposal made by the Jordanian delegation head Abdullah Toukan was emblematic of the collective willingness to institutionalize the group: during a meeting in Jordan in 1994, ACRS accepted Toukan’s proposal to create a Regional Security Center, modeled after the CSCE communication center in The Hague, yet at the same time different from that center. Indeed, the new Center would have been used primarily for studies on conflict resolution, so as to draw further lessons from the past, rather than as a communication hub between military administrations (Feldman, 1997a:11). By proposing to institutionalize their itinerant foreign policy forum, which until then, moved from place to place, ACRS experts sought to escape the double bind in which they were trapped and get some official recognition for their success.

How can we explain this success? In this section, I highlight the complicity between the use of the analogy between Europe and the Middle East and broader discursive norms, especially the taboo over Israel’s nuclear weapons program, which ACRS experts carefully avoided violating, by burying some important differences between Europe’s past and the future they envisioned for the Middle East.
At the origins of ACRS, we find the willingness of Middle Eastern states to get rid of nuclear weapons, after the discovery that Saddam Hussein had been close to obtaining them in 1990. At the time, Egypt developed its ideas on the contours of a peaceful New Middle East with the “Mubarak initiative” of 1990, which conceived of the Middle East as a WMD Free Zone. The goals of the initiative were reaffirmed by the head of the Egyptian delegation, Nabil Fahmy (future Minister of Foreign Affairs in Egypt), in the ACRS meetings of 1992 (Feldman, 1997a:8). At the beginning of the talks, as Feldman (1997a:7) writes, “Israel stressed the deep distrust prevailing in the region and the importance of dealing with conventional weapons” before nuclear questions, but in what seemed a surprising move, the Israeli Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, the architect of Israel’s nuclear program and defense posture since the mid-1950s (Cohen, 2010), announced that talks on the prohibition of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons in the Middle East should also occur in the context of ACRS. Through his voice, Israel stressed the need to envision the “Middle East” as a Zone free of nuclear as well as chemical and biological weapons. When he signed the Chemical Weapons Convention during the conference of January 1993 in Paris, Shimon Peres essentially “adopted the substance of the Mubarak initiative but made it clear that the establishment of the WMD Free Zone in the Middle East would be required prior [to the] establishment of peace” (Feldman, 1997a:8) in the region. Thus, when the American and Russian cosponsors suggested in late 1992 that each party to the ACRS deliberations “define long-term objectives (a ‘vision’) for the process” (Feldman, 1997a:7), most states agreed to open the nuclear file as well as the biological and chemical weapons files.

The nuclear issue was included in the broad “roadmap,” or “plan,” officially discussed by the regional and world powers. This willingness to talk about every topic, even nuclear issues, could be interpreted as an indication that the taboo over Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons was about to end, at least in discussions by experts inside the ACRS group. But did this political will really exist? That taboo dated back at least twenty years, from when President Nixon and Prime Minister Golda Meier agreed in the 1970s that Israel would never publicly acknowledge its nuclear weapons, and that in exchange, the United States would neither force Israel to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a Non-Nuclear Weapon State (NNWS), nor would it force Israel to open its nuclear facilities to inspection by the IAEA (Cohen, 2010:29). In fact, most of the ACRS experts did not wish to open the
file of Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons and its non-adherence to the NPT in public – with the exception of the Egyptian ACRS experts like Nabil Fahmy. Indeed, as Feldman (1997a:129) writes, “it appeared that Arab officials felt threatened both by Israel’s nuclear ambiguity and by the prospect that Israel’s nuclear option might become explicit.” For instance, the “revelations” made during the “Vanunu affair” in 1986 (Feldman, 1997a:128) showed that increased transparency over Israel’s nuclear status could destroy trust rather than increase it: many Arabs were shocked by the revelation that Israel’s nuclear arsenal amounted to about 200 operational nuclear warheads, as the large size of that stock contradicted Israel’s private justification that nuclear weapons were weapons of last resort (in that case, 10-20 nuclear weapons would be enough to deter Arabs from using WMDs on Israel’s soil).

Besides, an explicit official recognition by Israel of its nuclear past would have triggered dramatic effects in Arab states (as well as in Iran), and Arab statesmen would have had to characterize such recognition as a major threat to their security that warranted their decision to leave the NPT (which is permissible with three-months notice, per art. 10.1). Even when Egyptian participants insisted that Israel should immediately commit to sign the NPT, before the creation of any new regional organization in charge of mutual verification, they did not state that Israel’s signature should come with a full disclosure of its nuclear past or an opening of military bases in which Israeli nuclear weapons might be stored. As the NPT only forces the NNWS (but not NWS) to sign with the IAEA a Safeguards Agreement on all their “peaceful” activities using source and special fissionable materials, one could imagine that during a first period, Israel’s signature would have only amounted to a freeze on its military nuclear activities, but that Israeli special fissionable materials already in nuclear warheads would have escaped IAEA controls.23 Although this legal point was not discussed explicitly, it was clear that Arab states did not want to see Israel “come clean,” in the words of those who advocate for Israel to declare its nuclear weapons arsenal (Bundy, Crowe and Drell, 1993:68-70). In fact, they stressed the possibility of agreeing on future common goods without a prior resolution (or even discussion) of the contentious issues of the past, in

23 Regarding NNWS’ safeguarding obligations, the NPT says that “[t]he safeguards required by this article shall be applied to all source or special fissionable material in all peaceful [my emphasis] nuclear activities within the territory of such State, under its jurisdiction, or carried out under its control anywhere” (art. 3.1). The NPT leaves obscure how the IAEA could be involved in verifying nuclear disarmament.
contrast to the model of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, and their emphasis on the public acknowledgement of past wrongs. Their plan to move nations forward assumed that one’s past should not be an obstacle on the road toward the creation of a common perspective, and that peacemakers should draw a thick veil—to paraphrase Rawls (1985)—, or rather, a velvet curtain, of ignorance over the contentious past in order to make peace.24

Then, it was not surprising if ACRS experts did not move very far from the original Israeli position in the joint Declaration of Principles that they issued after their Plenary Session in Tunis (December 1994). In the Declaration, experts included a list of shared goals, except on the nuclear question: in this area, the parties agreed to leave apparent the distinct positions of Egypt and Israel over the steps to achieve the Zone (Dassa Kaye 2007; Landau and Dassa Kaye 2011). The Egyptian position linked the creation of the Zone to the signature by Israel of the NPT as a NNWS (in violation of the Israeli official position, which is to avoid discussing the NPT and Israel’s status as either a NWS or a NNWS in any official document); the Israeli position was also written down in the Declaration, and it excluded any reference to the NPT while endorsing a regional “mutual verification regime”25 to verify compliance with the Zone requirements (reproduced in Feldman, 1997a: 320-325).26 The Israeli ACRS participants justified their preference for regional rather than IAEA controls on pragmatic rather philosophical grounds: as Shai Feldman (1997b:17) writes, “in contrast to India, Israel did not dispute the rationale of the NPT, … it only viewed the application of the treaty as flawed,” as illustrated by the fact that the IAEA had not prevented clandestine nuclear proliferation in the case of Pakistani sales of centrifuges to Iraq.27 This disagreement (the last and only one, and one that was limited to Egypt and Israel) was proof that ACRS deliberations could achieve some great measure of success in a fairly limited amount of time. It also showed that the taboo over the Israeli possession on nuclear issues was hard to remove: the official statements coming from ACRS did not single out Israel’s nuclear past as

24 This contrasts with Habermas’s (1995:117) normative definition of deliberative justice which “rests on the intuition that ... from an [transparent] interlocking of perspectives emerges an ideally extended we-perspective.”
25 The same proposal was also expressed outside the ACRS deliberations: for instance, the U.N. General Assembly commissioned a report in 1990 to the Secretary General, whose conclusions made it clear that a Zone could adopt more rigorous “verification procedures” than those adopted by the IAEA (Feldman, 1997a:160).
26 Foreign Minister Shimon Peres had publicly said that after Israel signed peace with all the member-states of the Zone, it would only take two years for Israel to start the nuclear disarmament phase (Landau, 2008:13).
27 Israel pointed to the fact that the IAEA had failed to conduct “short notice” and “challenge” inspections in order to maintain good relationships with member-states (Feldman, 1997a:154).
the only one outside the law (here, identified with the NPT), and left a welcomed ambiguity over the timing and monitoring of Israel’s future nuclear disarmament efforts.

The preservation of the nuclear taboo over Israel’s nuclear weapons among ACRS participants explains why, for such experts who were so prone to underlining the differences between Europe and the Middle East, they refrained from mentioning the most obvious difference between Europe’s past and the future they envisioned for the Zone in the Middle East: the fact that in contrast to their envisioned WMD Free Zone in the Middle East, Europe was the land of nuclear plenty. Indeed, Europe still has two independent nuclear weapon states (NWS), France and the U.K., and five Western non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS) still holding nuclear weapons under dual-key on behalf of NATO (Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Turkey). Furthermore, NATO countries have rejected most attempts made to open deliberations on the creation of a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in Europe, and France has consistently blocked attempts to de-nuclearize NATO as an alliance (Mallard 2014). Thus, if the goal were really to learn how to create a WMD Free Zone, Europe would have been one of the most unlikely candidate regions from which to learn. A Middle East looking like Europe after the end of the Cold War would have meant that Israel would have maintained its nuclear deterrent and could be recognized as a NWS under the NPT – an option that was for instance advocated by prominent U.S. experts (Bundy, Crowe and Drell, 1993:68-70) – and that all Arab states and Israel would have to sign security guarantees with the United States, which would agree to station troops and even nuclear weapons (oriented toward a common enemy like, for instance, Iran) on behalf of the new alliance. But on this question, ACRS participant did not use the forward analogy between Europe and the Middle East: its narrative potentiality only extended to the realm of discourses that did not challenge the taboo over Israel’s nuclear status. In so doing, participants worked to maintain the complicity between the use of their favored analogy and broader discursive norms in the Middle East.

None of the ACRS experts explicitly underlined this fundamental difference between Europe’s past (present and future) and their envisioned future for the Middle East. When ACRS participants agreed to look toward Europe at the same time as they left Pandora’s box.

28 This is why others have proposed that the “Middle East” be modeled after “Africa,” and that Middle Eastern states should look at the Pelindaba Treaty (Miller and Scheinman, 2007).
(e.g. Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons) closed, they signaled that they prioritized the continuation of peace negotiations among themselves over the implausible achievement of an immediate denuclearization. That might be the reason why Middle Eastern diplomats preferred to compare their envisioned Middle East to Europe rather than to other regions (like Africa), as Europe is quite exceptional in the sense that it achieved what appears as long-lasting peace with a continued presence of nuclear weapons in the region. The comparison with Europe’s past offered a discursive form that was not threatening to the nuclear taboo in the Middle East, as its translation to their region would not force Israel to reveal its lies about not possessing nuclear weapons, nor would it force Israel to destroy its nuclear arsenal. This might also explain why the reference to Euratom has worked as a productive catalyst to spur new track-II discussions in the context of the renewed calls for talks on the WMD Free Zone in the Middle East. Indeed, Euratom has never imposed nuclear disarmament nor even nuclear non-proliferation requirements on its parties (Mallard 2014). In this context, the reference to Europe’s foreign past achieved two goals in the context of the Middle East: it drew the attention of the Middle Eastern parties away from their own contentious nuclear past; at the same time, it preserved the most important taboo in the diplomatic negotiations in the region.

4. **How Context Matters: When Forward Analogies Are No Longer a Scenario-Making Exercise**

Until the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, the dramaturgy of negotiations followed by the ACRS experts was based on the use of a forward analogy, which experts systematically used to constitute “their” common Middle East as an object of discussion in contradistinction with Europe – although the explicit emphasis on differences did not extend to the nuclear realm. Not mentioning the difference between Europe’s nuclear past (and present) and a future nuclear-free Middle East was central to the continuation of ACRS talks, as was made manifest when Egyptian experts suddenly departed from this dramaturgy. But a major shift in the Madrid peace process put an end to that process of
As I explain in this section, when the scene in which these strategic talks moved from the unofficial to the official stage, ACRS talks abruptly ended. This shift occurred when Egypt insisted on making explicit references to Israel’s position with regard to the NPT in the ACRS talks; and then bringing the results of ACRS (which until then, had been framed as just a scenario-making exercise) into official diplomatic negotiations (in the NPT Review Conference of 1995).

First, until 1995, President Mubarak of Egypt had given the impression that the attempt by Egyptian diplomats like Nabil Fahmy to impose a reference to the NPT in the ACRS Final Declaration was not shared by the top Egyptian military leadership. Until then, the Egyptian initiatives to force Israel to sign the NPT as a NNWS came mostly from Egypt’s Foreign Minister Amr Musa and Fahmy, his advisor, who “attempted to organize a united Arab effort to press Israel to sign the NPT by threatening not to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)” (Feldman, 1997a:214). This position was first presented at the 1989 Paris Convention and had remained consistent since (Feldman 1997a:215). Initially, the Israelis believed that this pressure reflected the professional bias of career diplomats like Fahmy and Musa for U.N.-based negotiations, but that it was not shared by military professionals like Mubarak (Feldman 1997a:2010). But in the months preceding the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, Egypt proposed to link further progress in the adoption of confidence building measures modeled after the precedent in Europe with Israel’s signature of the NPT, and in 1995, Mubarak himself “became personally identified with these efforts” (Feldman, 1997a:217). The Egyptians’ insistence on clarifying the nuclear status of Israel in the Middle East departed from the relative silence that ACRS participants had maintained on this issue, and on the difference between their envisioned Middle East and Europe’s nuclear status.

Second, not only did Egyptian diplomats and politicians insist on talking about Israel’s nuclear status within ACRS, but they also related the discussions in ACRS with the ongoing NPT Extension negotiations. For the first time in early 1995, President Mubarak said that Egypt would not sign the NPT for an unlimited period if Israel did not also sign the

\[29\] The process of institutionalization started in 1994, as Feldman (1997a:14, 15) underlines, as the ACRS activities forced inexperienced central administrations in many Arab countries to “develop a cadre of experts” and to “appoint individuals and small governmental bodies to prepare for ACRS activities, creating small bureaucratic islands that had gradually developed more than a fleeting interest in arms control.”
NPT as a NNWS (Landau, 2008: 14). The Egyptian decision to outsource the deliberations of the Zone to the NPT Review Conferences signaled their determination to avoid slipping into a path whereby Israel would obtain a stamp of certification on their (opaque) nuclear status by the fourteen Arab states which participated in ACRS. But in the process of transferring the debate over the “Middle East” as a WMD Free Zone from ACRS to the NPT Review Conferences, Egypt lost the direct engagement with Israel, as Israel did not participate in the five-year NPT Review Conferences, and the talks with Israel lost the fictional character provided by the claim that Arab states and Israel were only “learning” from Europe. The Israeli reaction was immediate: they refused to position themselves with regard to the NPT Review Conference’s declarations, and they stopped their involvement with ACRS. As Feldman (1997b:14) noted, “Israel attempted to avoid international conferences in which it might have faced a united Arab front that would be influenced by the most hardline of the Arab states… and it rejected the imposition of linkages that might have made the process hostage to the preferences of the least cooperative party.”

Even though Egypt’s campaign was not successful,\(^\text{30}\) as no Arab block coalesced around Egypt’s strategy in the 1995 NPT Conference (instead, all Arab states agreed to sign the NPT for an unlimited period),\(^\text{31}\) the effect on ACRS deliberations was quite dramatic. As soon as Egyptians transferred their criticism of Israel’s nuclear posture from the (non)negotiating platform of ACRS to other more international and official venues, the performative character of ACRS ceased to operate: the Egyptian move was immediately sanctioned by the United States, which cancelled the ACRS session scheduled for September 1995 in Washington. With the failure of ACRS, the problem of constituting the “Middle East” as a geo-strategic reality resurfaced. In the context of deliberations in which most participating states did not officially recognize each other, only a scenario-making exercise could be seen as legitimate, and as soon as the latter were associated with real-life negotiations, controversies erupted between the parties (Israel and most of the other Arab states) for whom “progressive ‘confidence building measures’ could be seen as … basic truisms,” and those for whom they “were instead major concessions” (Brynen 1994:52).

\(^{30}\) Egypt only obtained a complementary “Resolution on the Middle East,” which called all NPT signatories to facilitate the creation of the Zone (Feldman 1997a:222), as a face-saving token. The NPT Review and Extension Conference did not mention Israel by name.

\(^{31}\) Neither was the Egypt-led boycott of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) followed by Arab states, most of which had signed the CWC by the end of 1993.
Whereas ACRS talks had advanced despite the absence of Syria, Iraq or Iran, whose inclusion in the WMD Free Zone would be necessary in the future, after 1995, the fact that ACRS did not include all the member-states that would be included in the future Zone also became a major problem (Ben Dor, 1999:203). Egypt’s decision to shift deliberations of the Zone out of the ACRS and into a real diplomatic forum ultimately destroyed the reality of that new “Middle East.”

5. Conclusion

Many decisions of world-historical importance, as David Gibson (2011b:1) writes about the Cuban Missile Crisis, are shaped by how people talk about the future. Still, as he adds, if we now “know a great deal about how [people] construct stories about the past,”—as the latter has been the focus of a wide range of studies on national narratives (Olick 1999; Savelsberg and King 2005; Torpey 2006; Schwartz 2011)—we still know “little about how people tell stories about the future,” (Gibson 2011a:368) and how the latter can help policymakers, ordinary citizens and other individuals coordinate to produce or resist social and political change.

Building upon the dramaturgical tradition (Goffman, 1959) and the recent interest in anticipatory practices in international relations (Lakoff, 2007; Aradau and Van Munster, 2011) and cultural practices more generally (Cerulo 2007; Tavory and Eliasoph 2013), this article showed how analogical reasoning was used to “constitute” objects of comparison (here, regional orders) into stable objects of deliberation and intervention. So far, the literature that looks at the significance of knowledge practices designed to envision the future, such as modeling, forecasting, and scenario planning, has emphasized the predictive use of metaphors and comparisons: their use by policy makers to foresee the likely consequence of their action in a world of uncertainties, or their varying level of success (or failure) to predict likely outcomes (May, 1973; Jervis, 1976; Kuklick, 2006). But as this article claims, analogies used to talk about the future play an essential part in constituting strategic outcomes (such as a peaceful region) as objects of knowledge and intervention. Forward analogies can serve such constitutive purposes as they can give, in the present, a higher degree of reality to an unstable ontology (like a region) whose future existence and whose contours have yet to be defined. In the case under study, the commensuration made
between “Europe” and the “Middle East” helped constitute the latter as an object of deliberation across former warring parties (Israel and Arab states).

More research should compare the use of such analogies with other anticipatory techniques, like worst-case scenario-making, which have been the focus of a number of studies (Clarke, 2004; Cerulo, 2006; Lakoff, 2007) since September 11. In most worst-case exercises carried out by present-day preparedness experts, the future that participants play is a never-experienced (hence, non-historical) future, which is highly implausible as it represents the worst-case scenario, like the explosion of a dirty bomb in New York or a small pox attack on U.S. territory (Lakoff 2007; Mallard and Lakoff 2011). These worst-case exercises also draw upon analogical reasoning, although of a different kind. In these games, participants are required to fully believe in the fictions that they are asked to consider. Such emphasis on the future continues the tradition of the games of nuclear warfare performed by Herman Kahn (1962) during the Cold War, which required that participants draw an analogy between a fictive implausible future (seriously considered) and a more plausible nearer future (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2000; Aradau and van Munster 2011:22, 75). In the analogy between Europe and the Middle East under study, the “ontological valence” of the terms of the analogy is reversed if compared to these worst-case scenarios: here, the future to be envisioned by the participants was the historically existing case (Europe’s past), but the latter was not ontologically stronger than the “reality” that they were asked to compare it with (e.g. the Middle East as it is in the present). Throughout the process of deliberation, participants to track-II meetings were indeed careful to respect broader discursive norms that were elaborated independently of their meetings, rather than consider all options and issues open for discussion.

In the case under study, the analogy worked differently from a metaphor, as those experts who used the analogy were careful to emphasize both the similarities between both contexts and some important differences. Still, as I have shown, some important differences between the Middle East’s envisioned future and the European precedent remained blackboxed: in particular, the story of both regions’ nuclear history. As it happened, it was absolutely key for such an analogy to function that some differences remained taboo while

32 Seen from the point of view of legitimacy, positively ignoring (or “obviating”) the military past (like the story of many campaigns and battles) as an object of knowledge allowed Kahn to de-legitimize the monopoly that military professionals had over military knowledge, and speak to a broader American public.
the talks were going on. In particular, by focusing the deliberation on a foreign past rather than on their own, participants in these talks avoided opening the blackbox of their own taboo histories with the bomb. During my participation in track-II conferences, I also observed that especially after moments of uneasiness (for instance, when some participants put the very legitimacy of deliberations into question), panel chairs typically focus the discussion back on forward analogies, which allow participants to draw their attention away from the contentious realities of their region, and thus help negotiators avoid the many taboos (like discussing the existence of Israeli nuclear weapons), which plague strategic talks in the Middle East.

By focusing on forward analogies, this article expands the study of scenario-making exercises (Lakoff, 2007; Guilhot, 2011), which are routinely conducted to re-create geopolitical threats in laboratory conditions. In contrast to other constructivist scholars of anticipatory knowledge practices, who have focused on future-oriented practices that help constitute catastrophic events and worst-case scenarios as objects of intervention (Aradau and Van Munster, 2011), this article has examined how anticipatory knowledge constitutes best-case scenarios into objects of intervention. In doing so, this article also corrects a trend in the studies of governmentality (Foucault 2009), which focus more often on “prudential” anticipatory practices involved in the management of collective “evils” (pandemics, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, etc.) rather than on “conjectural” knowledge practices involved in the production of collective “goods” (like peace, progress and human security). This is a particularly pressing task for cultural sociologists. If war, as we know from countless studies, requires the mobilization of the hearts and minds around narratives of sacrifice and apocalypse, so does prudent diplomatic engagement, Philip Smith (2006) adds; and the latter are rarely described as cultural narratives. This article thus sought to explore the cultural logics underpinning such peace-making efforts. As other scenario-making exercises become the object of study, we will soon be able to better understand how one successfully moves from scenarios to real-life, an essential step toward explaining how fictions can change reality.

**Bibliography**


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Table 1: Historical and Forward Analogies