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(ACRS) Working Group'**

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Summary:

A Department of State summary of of the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group, released during the George W. Bush administration.

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Middle East Peace Process Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Working Group

The Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group is one of five multilateral groups formed shortly after the opening round of the Middle East Peace Process in Madrid in October 1991 and the only such group devoted exclusively to security issues. The ACRS working group, along with four other multilateral working groups addressing refugees, the environment, water, and regional economic development, complements the bilateral track of negotiations between Israel and its immediate neighbors. Thirteen Arab states, Israel, a Palestinian delegation, and over a score of extra-regional entities participate in plenary and intercessional meetings focusing on both conceptual and operational confidence building and arms control measures applicable to the Middle East.

Since May 1992, the United States and the Russian Federation (co-gavel holders of the ACRS working group) have chaired six plenary sessions. Until mid-1993, the working group focused primarily on familiarizing the regional parties with arms control and also with one another. The parties were presented with explanations of the histories and provisions of arms control agreements implemented in the Middle East and in other regions, including those measures adopted by the then-Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Expert-level meetings held between the plenaries focused principally on Confidence Building Measures (CBM) discussions in five areas: declaratory measures, communications, maritime agreements, military information exchange, and conflict prevention/regional security. In addition, these so-called intercessional events helped to develop a cadre of expert-level political and military delegates in the Middle East versed in the details of CBMs and other arms control measures.

By 1994, due to progress in the bilateral peace process, ACRS meetings moved from outside the region to within it. The fifth plenary, hosted by Qatar in May 1994, was the first such meeting to be held in the region. Tunisia hosted the sixth plenary in December 1994. In addition, intercessional meetings continued in Cairo and Amman, as well as in other venues outside the region. There were a number of special site visits. For example, regional parties toured a British air base to observe how to conduct visits to military installations and the parties observed a NATO military exercise. Parties toured a German nuclear power plant and discussed the interaction between the IAEA and its regional verification authority, EURATOM. Parties toured a Swiss chemical weapon verification laboratory and a Finnish chemical weapon verification-related training facility as a part of a workshop on implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. In addition, parties agreed to the establishment of regional security centers in Jordan, Qatar, and Tunisia, and a regional communications network was initiated -- using the OSCE network hub in The Hague until completion of a permanent hub in Cairo. Finally, ACRS parties successfully negotiated and reached agreement on measures related to search and rescue coordination, pre-notification of certain military activities, INCSEA, and exchange of military information.

Due to complications in the peace process, the agreed measures have not been implemented and ACRS has not held a formal plenary meeting since September 1995. Still, the group continues to pursue informal activities and many regional parties attend an average of a dozen Track II events per year.

ACRS members are:

☐ **Regional Parties:** Jordan, Israel, Palestinians, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania;

☐ **Co-Gavel Holders:** United States and Russian Federation;

☐ **Extra-Regional Parties (Active):** Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Danish, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the

Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, European Union, OSCE, United Nations, and IAEA.