

**NAVAL CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT:
PROSPECTS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST**

Abstract

This paper examines theoretical and practical aspects of select naval confidence-building measures (NCBMs) within the overall Middle East peace process. Specifically, it looks at the feasibility of introducing a structure of "Incidents at Sea" agreements between various Middle East countries and of establishing a coordination organization to facilitate non-political activities at sea such as search and rescue. Further, the paper discusses the potential benefits that could accrue through less formal agreements, such as routine staff talks between regional navies. The paper concludes that a progressive approach to NCBMs could work in the Middle East and that initial efforts should focus on developing a series of bilateral search and rescue coordination agreements and simple "Incidents at Sea" agreements. These would be a catalyst for deeper cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this discussion paper is to examine the prospects for implementing select Naval Confidence Building Measures (NCBMs) in the Middle East, specifically the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea/Suez Canal/Gulf of Aqaba areas.

Because NCBMs are a relatively new and largely untried means of reducing tension between the naval forces of states, there are few case studies upon which to build a convincing argument for either probable success or failure of specific measures. Thus, any examination of the feasibility of such measures must be founded on theory. However, theory can be put to the test in