



Nuclear Arms Control: A Realistic Global Agenda

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Summary¹

The optimism of 2009–10 is fading, and political momentum is faltering, on new nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation measures. To re-energize the global arms control debate, it is important that advocates for change spell out action agendas which are realistic and capable of being embraced by all relevant players – not only civil society organizations, but the major nuclear-armed states and other significant state actors capable of applying peer group pressure. Disarmament advocacy, while continuing to stress complete elimination as the objective, should recognize the complex dynamics of particular pair relationships (including US–Russia, US–China, and India–Pakistan), and focus in the short and medium term on the “minimization” agenda: stabilization of, and major further reductions in, nuclear weapons stockpiles; dramatic reductions in weapons deployment and launch readiness; and universal acceptance of “No First Use” doctrine. Non-proliferation efforts need to focus not only on current break-out risks like Iran, but strengthening NPT compliance mechanisms, further building non-NPT treaties and arrangements like export controls, and winning industry and government support for proliferation-resistant technology and fuel supply arrangements.

The Current State of Play

1. Not so long ago, in 2009–10, there was considerable optimism – generated largely by the intellectual and moral commitment of the newly elected President Barack Obama, and some early substantive achievements, not least New

START– that the world might at last be seriously on the way to becoming nuclear-weapon-free. But that balloon has now largely deflated. Such good news as we have had – in particular the interim agreement recently reached on Iran, and the continuing commitment to the Nuclear Security Summit process – has been well and truly outweighed by less good news. The depressingly minimal level of achievement over the last three years is fully documented, up to the end of 2012, in the CNND report on *Nuclear Weapons: The State of Play*.² It is not a happy story.

2. On *disarmament*, New START did significantly reduce the number of US and Russian deployed strategic weapons. But it created no legal obligation to destroy any weapons, left the high-alert status of some 2,000 of them undisturbed, left weapons-modernization programs in place, left disagreements about missile defence and imbalances in conventional weapons capability unresolved, and subsequent talks on further draw-downs have gone nowhere fast. Without further significant movement by these two states, holding between them some 95 per cent of the world’s total of more than 17,000 nuclear weapons, no other nuclear-armed state has felt pressure to downsize, and on all available evidence China, India, and Pakistan in fact have been increasing their stockpiles.

3. On *non-proliferation*, the main success of the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference (RevCon) was not to collapse in disarray, as had its 2005 predecessor. But it is going to be difficult to repeat even that modest achievement in 2015, particularly if talks on a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East

¹ This paper is an edited version of a presentation to the International Luxembourg Forum on Preventing Nuclear Catastrophe Supervisory Board Annual Meeting, Warsaw, 10 December 2013.

² Ramesh Thakur and Gareth Evans, eds, *Nuclear Weapons: The State of Play* (Canberra: Centre for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, ANU, 2013), accessible at cnnd.anu.edu.au.

remain as stalled as they have been. We are no closer than we have ever been to getting agreement on strengthening the NPT regime to make life harder for states like the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) purporting to withdraw from it, or to seriously addressing the problems of latency or deliberate hedging squarely raised by Iran's nuclear behaviour. On safeguards, twelve non-weapon states with significant nuclear activities have yet to conclude a voluntary Additional Protocol, and the major nuclear technology providers have yet to make this a condition of supply. On a treaty to ban further production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, negotiations in Geneva remain at a total impasse, with Pakistan the overt obstacle to progress, but with India and China comfortably sheltering behind it. And on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), despite President Obama's good intentions, the US Senate is no closer to ratifying it, and China, India, and Pakistan, among others, take shelter behind that inaction, with a fragile voluntary moratorium (and in the case of the DPRK not even that) the only obstacle to resumed testing.

4. Even on *nuclear security*, where the two Summits have so far have generated some momentum towards ensuring that weapon-useable materials, currently stored in multiple locations in some countries, and weapons themselves, do not fall into the hands of rogue states or terrorists, the reality is that on what really matters here – getting tough new common international rules agreed, matched by serious international transparency and accountability – progress has been, and looks like remaining, painfully slow.

Re-energizing the Debate

5. If nuclear non-proliferation and arms control are to *have* a future, there are some basic messages that have to be drummed into the heads of the world's policymakers and those, including in the media and commentariat, who influence them. First, complacency is not an option: we simply have to get serious about eliminating the whole range of risks associated with nuclear weapons and civil nuclear energy. Those risks are real. Quite apart from what non-state terrorist actors might be able to do if they ever got their hands on weapons or fissile material, the prospect of nuclear catastrophe from the use or misuse of state-held weapons – more likely from human error, system error, miscalculation or cyber sabotage than deliber-

ate aggressive decision – is in fact higher now than it has ever been.

6. Second, reliance on nuclear deterrence is misplaced. Policymakers in those states who are now nuclear-armed, or who would like to be, simply cannot go on making comfortable assumptions, born of a reading – or misreading – of Cold War experience, about the utility of nuclear deterrence. Cold War assumptions are irrelevant to today's multi-actor world, and the arguments against any state, big or small, relying for its security on nuclear weapons are formidable. I have spelt out those arguments elsewhere and will not repeat them here.³ We do have to acknowledge the reality that so long as nuclear weapons remain, the present nuclear-armed states – whether this be a rational motivation or not – are going to want to maintain at least a minimum nuclear-deterrent capability. But that can be done with drastically reduced arsenals in the case of the United States and Russia, and, at worst, maintenance at current levels for the other nuclear-armed states; it can be done with many fewer weapons actually deployed; it can be done with many fewer weapons maintained on high alert; and it can be done while dramatically reducing the salience of nuclear weapons in the security doctrines of the nuclear-armed states, and those US allies and others who may rely on their protection.

7. In getting these messages out and embedded in the policymaker minds that matter, slogan-eering will not do the job: sound bites and tweets are not the route to nuclear salvation. Nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, and civil nuclear energy risk reduction are inextricably connected, and they call for sustained commitment around a comprehensive, well-argued set of inter-related agendas, setting out targets which are, and are seen to be, realistically achievable, even if only in some cases over a very long haul.

8. Setting and implementing these agendas is not going to happen without some serious political leadership, and that is going to be necessary at three levels:

- First, *top down* from the major weapons states. The United States, Russia and China have the most crucial roles,

³ *Why Nuclear Weapons Must Be Eliminated*, APLN/CNND Policy Brief No. 2 (June 2013), accessible at <http://apln.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Policy-Brief-No-2-Why-Nuclear-Weapons-Must-Be-Eliminated.pdf>.

and it is crucial that President Obama's commitment be matched by his counterparts, and sustained by their successors. The P5 Nuclear Dialogue initiated in 2009 is a potentially helpful mechanism for generating momentum at this level, but it continues to promise more than it delivers.⁴

- Second, *sideways*, through peer group pressure maintained by other states of lesser power but with global or regional influence. The recent role of Switzerland and Norway in initiating a major new global debate on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons is a good example. More is needed from groupings like the NPDI,⁵ and from those US allies in NATO and the Asia-Pacific presently obstructing more than encouraging changes in US nuclear doctrine. The push to start negotiating a Nuclear Weapons Convention, which currently has wide but shallow international support, cannot be expected to bear fruit any time soon, but it remains a useful way of focusing attention on hard issues (like verification and enforcement) which will have to be resolved if elimination is to be achievable.
- And third, *bottom-up* from leading civil society organizations, like Global Zero, the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) and its networks (including the APLN and the European Leadership Network, ELN), and the International Luxembourg Forum on Preventing Nuclear Catastrophe. While it is probably too much to hope that the mass movements of the Cold War years can be recreated, it is important that governments feel under some real scrutiny from their publics, and the commentariat, on nuclear issues.

⁴ Nick Ritchie, *Pathways and Purposes for P-5 Nuclear Dialogue*, European Leadership Network (September 2013), http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/pathways-and-purposes-for-p-5-nuclear-dialogue_748.html.

⁵ The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) is a coalition of states formed in 2010 in an effort to help implement the Final Document of the 2010 NPT RevCon. Composed of Australia, Canada, Chile, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, the Philippines, Poland, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, it has issued a series of declarations concerning the pace of NPT negotiations and the need to swiftly move on both non-proliferation and disarmament. Nigeria and the Philippines joined the Initiative in September 2013.

9. So what are the agendas that should be pursued? While there is much more to be said on the subject of nuclear security, and civil nuclear energy risk reduction, this Brief focuses just on the two biggest and most central sets of issues, disarmament and non-proliferation. And in that order, essentially for the reason that, as the Canberra Commission put it succinctly back in 1996, "so long as any state has nuclear weapons, others will want them." If we are to get serious international buy-in for non-proliferation strategies, it will have to be against the background of a visibly credible commitment to nuclear arms control, and ultimately complete disarmament, by the existing nuclear-armed states.

The Disarmament Agenda

10. The first need for any credible strategy for disarmament is to keep objectives realistic. We must recognize that disarmament will not be achieved as a straight-line, continuous, process, but will need to involve two distinct stages, first "minimization" then "elimination," with some inevitable discontinuity between them. The International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), in its 2009 report, took the view that a target date of 2025 could be set for the achievement of a minimization objective – optimistic, but not wholly unrealistic provided serious momentum started to build early. This would involve reducing the global stockpile of all existing warheads to no more than 2,000 (a maximum of 500 each for the United States and Russia and 1000 for the other nuclear-armed states combined); dramatic reductions in weapons deployment and launch readiness; and all states being credibly committed by then to "No First Use."⁶

11. As much as the Commission wanted to move quickly thereafter to elimination, we took the view that it was simply not credible to set a further specific timeline for getting from low numbers to zero. We recognized that there are three big hurdles still to jump over, high enough, and with prospects of success uncertain enough, to make it impossible to set a believable target date. These are *psychological* (giving up the status and prestige that seems traditionally to have been associated with membership of the nuclear weapons club);

⁶ ICNND, *Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers* (Canberra: International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, 2009), paras 1.81–138.

technical (verification and enforcement, so every state can be confident that every other is complying, that any violation of the prohibition is readily detected, and any breakout controllable); and *geopolitical* (creating an environment in the key regions of North East Asia, South Asia and the Middle East stable enough for no country to have any serious concern about existential threats, even if not all sources of potential tension have disappeared).⁷

12. These are all high hurdles but they should not be seen as brick walls. And some are less forbidding than others. Important work is being done on verification by the United Kingdom, Norway and United States and this part of the problem may well be solved over the next decade or so. So far as geopolitical issues are concerned, while it is crucial that every possible diplomatic effort continue to be made to soothe current tensions and ultimately settle outstanding issues between potential adversaries, it is important not to make *any* movement on nuclear disarmament conditional upon the resolution of regional conflicts, the settlement of major power tensions, or the achievement of real balance in the conventional military capability of relevant pairs of states. These developments should be seen as complementary and mutually reinforcing, and pursued simultaneously.

13. To approach the disarmament agenda realistically, it is necessary to focus not just on broad, general themes, but also on ways of moving forward in each of the crucial pair-relationships between the major nuclear weapons players. In each case the key to progress, as in all diplomacy, is to try to understand the interests and perspectives of the other side, and to find ways of accommodating them without putting at real risk genuinely vital interests of one's own.⁸

14. As to the *United States and Russia*, despite some recent improvement in bilateral atmospherics with cooperation over Iran and on chemical weapons in Syria, progress remains stalled on recommencing serious further arms reduction negotiations of the kind proposed again by President Obama in his June 2013 Berlin speech. The key will be for Washington to give Moscow an acceptable response to its concerns about ballistic missile defence sys-

tems and new long-range conventional weapons systems seriously diminishing its second-strike retaliatory capability – exaggerated though these concerns may be, and as absurd as any such anxiety might appear more than twenty years after the end of the Cold War. James Acton's recent work on Conventional Prompt Global Strike will hopefully prompt some overdue thinking in Washington about the costs and risks involved, and the wider implications for the future of nuclear arms control, of giving the Pentagon its head in developing this new capability.⁹

15. A long menu of steps designed to break the two countries out of "Cold War autopilot" mode has been usefully proposed in the report published in early 2013, *Building Mutual Security in the Euro-Atlantic Region*, co-authored by former UK Defence Minister Des Browne, former Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, former US Senator Sam Nunn, and Munich Security Conference chair, Wolfgang Ischinger.¹⁰ Its recommendations include specific cooperative strategies on missile defence, acceptance of legally binding limits on the development and deployment of prompt-strike conventional forces, new confidence building measures on conventional forces generally, reciprocal commitments to progressively removing strategic forces from prompt-launch status, and reciprocal cuts in tactical nuclear weapons. While initial responses to these proposals have not, again, been very positive on either side of the Atlantic, if momentum can be generated around all these elements over the next few years, the 2025 minimization target described by the ICNND is not out of reach.

16. As to the *United States and China*, there are two general keys to ensuring that China does not break out of its current "minimal deterrence" posture, and eventually joins in a serious nuclear disarmament enterprise. The first is success in advancing the US–Russia agenda just described, because without major further reductions in the arsenals of the big two it will be artificial to hope that China will begin to reduce its own. The second, perhaps more difficult for the United States to embrace, but cru-

⁷ ICNND, *Eliminating Nuclear Threats*, paras 19.5–26.

⁸ The following text is largely drawn from Gareth Evans, "Nuclear Deterrence in Asia and the Pacific," in *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 1:1 (2014), pp. 1–21.

⁹ James Acton, *Silver Bullet: Asking the Right Questions about Conventional Prompt Global Strike* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013), <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cpgs.pdf>.

¹⁰ Des Browne, Wolfgang Ischinger, Igor Ivanov, and Sam Nunn, *Building Mutual Security in the Euro-Atlantic Region* (London: ELN, 2013), https://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/BMS_Summary_Report_FINAL.pdf.

cially necessary, is for Washington to accept more openly and explicitly than it has so far been prepared to, that its nuclear relationship with China is one of “mutual vulnerability.”¹¹

17. It will be important in this respect for the United States here, as with Russia, to defuse concern about its growing missile defence and long-range conventional strike capability. As to missile defence, Alexei Arbatov and Vladimir Dvorkin have plausibly argued that the current multi-layered BMD system in the Pacific is adequate to counter North Korean missile launches, and that any further development of US sea and land-based assets will be increasingly seen as having an anti-Chinese purpose and should not be pursued.¹²

18. As to *China and India*, just as China’s willingness to cooperate on nuclear tension reduction measures is largely contingent in practice on developments between the United States and Russia, so too is India’s cooperation largely dependent on developments in China. For example, just as China has made clear that it will not ratify the CTBT unless and until the United States does so, so has India made clear that it will wait upon China. There is no obvious way out of this impasse other than for India–China relations to improve to the point that neither believes to be remotely credible a major attack by the other – or at least until both sides come to accept that, in the words to me recently of former Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, “it would be rank, suicidal stupidity to even

think of any ‘nuclear’ solution to the issues that currently poison the air.”

19. As to *India and Pakistan*, the basic problem is that many in Pakistan are consumed by belief in both India’s malignant intent and its conventional superiority. A willingness by India to ratify the CTBT, to accept a moratorium on the further production of fissile material for weapons use, and to freeze its own nuclear weapons production (perhaps conditional on Pakistan doing likewise) – all of which could and should have been demanded of it by the Nuclear Suppliers Group as the quid pro quo for any supply of nuclear material or technology – would do much to improve the environment, and if New Delhi’s relationship with Beijing were to continue to improve significantly, these ambitious objectives might not be totally unachievable. However, just as the US–China relationship has a triangular Russian element, so is it the case that the India–Pakistan nuclear relationship is strongly impacted by China, and almost certainly cannot be resolved just on a bilateral basis.

20. The key to halting at least further increases in the nuclear arsenals of all three of these states is to get some common understanding and acceptance of what constitutes minimum credible nuclear deterrence for each of them. Given that if stockpiles and deployments are to be kept down, or drawn down, to very low numbers, the trade-off is almost certain to be each of these states having complete confidence in the survivability of its retaliatory strike capability. It may well be that we just have to accept – as difficult as this will be for many policymakers and analysts around the world – that this will involve all three of these states developing effective submarine launch capability.

21. As to the situation with *North Korea*, Pyongyang’s nuclear behaviour has been provocative, erratic and irresponsible, and recent top-level purges have reinforced concerns about the direction in which the country is going. But it would be wrong to assume that the leadership is completely irrational, or in any way suicidal. As someone who was involved as Australia’s Foreign Minister, albeit at some distance, in the negotiation and implementation of the 1994 Agreed Framework, I am less persuaded than some others that all the blame for the breakdown of that agreement belongs to Pyongyang, and I do not believe it is completely impossible, even now, to think of an-

¹¹ This would mean in practice that the United States “should plan and posture its force and base its own policy on the assumption that an attempted US disarming first strike, combined with US missile defenses, could not reliably deny a Chinese nuclear retaliatory strike on the United States.” CSIS, *Nuclear Weapons and US–China Relations: A Way Forward* (Washington DC: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2013), p.18, http://csis.org/files/publication/130307_Colby_USChinaNuclear_Web.pdf. The group’s members were divided on whether the United States should formally and publicly acknowledge “mutual vulnerability,” largely on the ground that this might worry regional allies, but united on the substance. This is also a recommendation of Alexei Arbatov and Vladimir Dvorkin, “The Great Strategic Triangle,” *The Carnegie Papers* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013), <http://carnegie.ru/2013/04/01/great-strategic-triangle/fvbx>. It is to be noted that the State Department’s International Security Advisory Board Report on US–China Strategic Stability (October 2012) recorded that “mutual nuclear vulnerability should be considered as a fact of life for both sides” <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/isab/200297.htm>.

¹² Arbatov and Dvorkin, “The Great Strategic Triangle,” p. 35.

other denuclearization agreement being reached.

22. What is important is that all North Korea's neighbours – including China – while continuing to make very clear their displeasure at the indefensible elements of Pyongyang's behaviour, stay calm and measured in their responses. It is not clear that there are any other options than the familiar trio of *containment*, *deterrence* and *keeping the door open for negotiations*. It is important that we all keep trying to break down over time the siege mentality which has afflicted North Korea's leadership, and pass up no dialogue opportunity. More generally, what is crucial is that North Korea's acquisition of nuclear capability not be used as an excuse by anyone in the region to walk away from a serious commitment to nuclear non-proliferation – and to disarmament. There are some troubling minority currents in this respect in South Korea, and even Japan, which must be resisted.

23. As to the position of those *US allies* presently sheltering – or believing they are sheltering – under the umbrella of extended nuclear deterrence, undoubtedly what they could most contribute to making nuclear disarmament happen would be to make clear their acceptance of a much reduced role for nuclear weapons in their protection. The United States manifestly has the conventional capability, and will have for the indefinitely foreseeable future, to fully protect its allies against any possible security threat. So long as South Korea, Japan, and others in the region (and key European allies) continue to insist that the nuclear option be kept open for a variety of non-nuclear threat contingencies, they are contributing nothing to the achievement of a nuclear-free world. Australia has been a small and muted voice for progress in this respect but it needs to do more.

The Non-Proliferation Agenda

24. The overriding objective of all non-proliferation efforts, since the negotiation of the NPT 35 years ago, is simply to ensure that no more states seek to acquire, or succeed in acquiring, nuclear weapons, with all the risks of use – deliberately or otherwise – that such acquisition entails. The strategies that need to be employed to advance this objective fall into a number of categories.

25. First, to strengthen the NPT's own mechanisms – safeguards in all their manifestations,

and compliance and enforcement arrangements – and ensure that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is effectively resourced to carry out its multiple functions in this respect. Much more needs to be done in each of these areas. There is a real need to move from the traditional nuclear material accounting associated with standard Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements to an information-driven and detection-focused approach, but there is still strong resistance by a number of important states to the idea of making Additional Protocol acceptance obligatory. The 2010 NPT RevCon made no progress on making withdrawal from or non-compliance with the treaty more painful, and little or none has been made since. And while there has been some modest growth in the IAEA's regular budget, this remains insufficient to meet the Agency's full range of responsibilities.

26. The second need is to strengthen or put in place supplementary mechanisms outside the NPT framework, including export controls, the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), and Nuclear Weapons Free Zones (NWFZ), as well as bringing into force the CTBT and negotiating to conclusion a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT). The PSI now has the support of around 100 countries and has probably exceeded expectations in helping make illicit WMD-related transfers harder. But elsewhere progress has been minimal. As already noted, nothing has been happening with respect to bedding down the remaining necessary CTBT ratifications or commencing FMCT negotiations. Despite many attempted constraints, ballistic missile technologies continue to proliferate. No new NWFZs have been established; movement towards a Middle East WMDZFZ remains minimal; and there has been only modest movement on protocol ratifications in relation to the existing treaties. On export controls, a growing number of states are making use of multilateral guidelines in developing national controls, but the Nuclear Suppliers Group's 2008 accommodation of India, and China's determination to supply more nuclear reactors to Pakistan have damaged this key mechanism's credibility, and no progress has been made towards adopting a criteria-based approach to cooperation agreements with states outside the NPT.

27. The general objective in this area must be to embrace the non-NPT nuclear-armed states in as many mechanisms and arrangements as

possible pursuing non-proliferation (and disarmament) objectives. Simply repeating the mantra, as so many states do in so many forums, that India, Pakistan and Israel should join the NPT has been conspicuously unproductive in the past and is likely to remain so in the future. North Korea is in a different category in this respect, and the objective of the Six Party talks should certainly continue to be to re-establish its non-nuclear weapon state status within the NPT. But so far as the three major nuclear-armed states outside the NPT are concerned, more intellectual energy needs to be put into identifying creative and innovative mechanisms and formulas by means of which they can be signed up to NPT-equivalent global disciplines.

28. The third component of non-proliferation strategy must be to win serious industry and government support in addressing the proliferation risks potentially associated with whatever expansion of civil nuclear energy occurs in the years ahead, although post-Fukushima this expansion seems likely to be much less dramatic than previously anticipated. Proliferation-resistant technology – involving mainly new reactor designs which make weapon-sensitive material harder to access – may be part of the answer in the longer run, but the most immediate need is to ensure that no new “bomb starter kits” (as fissile material production facilities have sometimes been described) are built by new countries. A necessary, if not sufficient, condition for achieving this is being able to offer such states assurances of supply of the fuel they need, the creation of an internationally managed fuel bank, or some other multilateral arrangement that would pose less risk. The IAEA is slowly moving down this path, but not fast enough for anyone’s comfort.

29. The fourth, and remaining, component of effective non-proliferation strategy must, of course, be to address, by every means appropriate, specific current break-out risks. The overwhelming priority for the international community in this respect at the moment is Iran, where it has to be assumed that should Tehran actually weaponize, others in the region, including Egypt and Turkey, will find a Shiite bomb intolerable and rapidly follow, with Saudi Arabia – acting in cooperation with Pakistan – the most likely immediate candidate.¹³ The break-out risks associated with

North Korea’s current status are less acute. Although the North Korean problem on the face of it is more immediately serious, given that the DPRK has already tested nuclear explosive devices and may possess up to ten of them, it is in a sense more manageable: neither of the countries most threatened by this development, Japan or South Korea, has shown serious signs of wanting to join the race.

30. In the case of Iran there is every reason now to be optimistic, following the conclusion of the November 2013 interim agreement, that no weaponization break-out will occur. It will certainly be difficult for negotiators over the next six months to extract from Iran verifiable commitments – not least in relation to the number and type of centrifuges it possesses, and its new plutonium-producing heavy-water reactor – that will satisfy US congressional hawks, let alone the Israelis. But I am one of those who has long believed – based on substantial contact with Iranian diplomats and negotiators over a number of years when I was President of the International Crisis Group – that Iranian objectives were always limited, and who now believes they have essentially been achieved, and that Iran (for that reason more than the pressure of sanctions, although these are now unquestionably biting very hard) is now ready to negotiate seriously. On this view the risks of Iran actually acquiring a weapon always far outweighed the benefits, and will continue to do so, and all that Tehran has ever wanted to do – in order to demonstrate its technological capability, reassert its claims to a leading role in the region, and make up for past humiliations going back to Mossadegh – was to acquire and demonstrate its bomb-making capability, but not cross that red line. Only time will tell whether this assessment will prevail, but it is crucial meanwhile that the hot-heads be restrained and that negotiations are allowed to take their course.

31. The Iran case has of course raised in the starkest possible way the question of how tolerant the international community can afford to be when it comes to non-nuclear countries developing capabilities which, while they may be capable of peaceful explanation, can all too

¹³ On Saudi Arabia, see for example NTI Global Security Newswire “Saudi Arabia Could Obtain Nuclear Arms from Pakistan at Any Time: Sources,” 7 November 2013,

<http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/pakistan-has-secret-deal-supply-saudi-arabia-nuclear-arms-sources/>; although a more sceptical view has been expressed in a Center for a New American Security paper, *Atomic Kingdom: If Iran Builds the Bomb, Will Saudi Arabia be Next?* (February, 2013), http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_AtomicKingdom_Kahl.pdf.

readily be applied to building nuclear weapons and delivery systems. There is no question that this risk was not fully appreciated at the time of the negotiation of the NPT. Although it might well be argued, for example, that there is a “right to enrich” under that treaty, that does not conclude the argument as to whether there *should* be now an unrestricted right to enrich, or the extent to which the wider international community should be tolerant of such claims and take no counter-measures.

32. The issues here are being systematically addressed in a research project on the security limits of nuclear tolerance being conducted by the International Luxembourg Forum on Preventing Nuclear Catastrophe and expected to publish its conclusions in 2014. They are quite complex. It is not difficult to identify a set of objective criteria as to whether a given country has, or is acquiring, the *capability* to make a nuclear weapon, with crucial factors being a capacity to produce or acquire fissile material, and evidence of certain research and development activities consistent with a nuclear weapons program. But, given the extent to which so much material, so many items, and so much research activity is dual use, that is, consistent with other objectives than manufacturing nuclear weapons, it is very much harder to be confident on the question of *intent*.

33. That is the case however many further objective criteria or warning signs one adds to the list (for example, volatile strategic environment, perception of external threat, history of confrontation, absence of protecting ally). Nuclear latency can be of three basic kinds – first, *inadvertent*, when a state may have the basic capability to make nuclear weapons but have no intention to do so, or to persuade anyone else that it has that capacity; second, *deliberate but limited* – when a state consciously develops a demonstrable break-out capability but has no actual intent, at least for the foreseeable future, to weaponize (which might be called hedging, and is arguably what Iran is doing); and third, *deliberate but unlimited* – where the latent capability is simply a way station en route to weaponization. While it is only the third kind of latency which is really alarming, there is of course a risk with the second kind (deliberate hedging) that in the absence of international pushback other states will be provoked to seek equivalent capability.

34. The most difficult question of all in this area is how to translate analysis – that a state is

at, or has passed, some threshold justifying alarm bells – into effective international action. While others like the Nuclear Suppliers Group or IAEA might have important roles in determining whether various criteria were satisfied, ultimately the responsibility for taking or authorizing appropriate counter-measures – whether admonitions, inspections or coercive measures invoking Chapter VII of the UN Charter – would fall on the Security Council. And one would have to be a supreme optimist to believe that the Council would be able or willing for the indefinitely foreseeable future to take on such a generalized responsibility. That said, if the P5, in their capacity as the five NPT nuclear-weapon states, were to demonstrate real commitment to disarmament by further rolling back (or, in the case of China, at least capping) their own nuclear arsenals, their authority to impose non-proliferation obligations on others would be strengthened.

35. These various difficulties should not, however, inhibit debate on how best in the future to strengthen a non-proliferation system which badly needs such strengthening, any more than the technical and other difficulties standing in the way of ultimate elimination should stop us debating how to accelerate the disarmament process.

Conclusion

36. Articulating and advocating realistic agendas for change will not by itself achieve that change. As with making the case against the utility of nuclear deterrence and for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, good argument is not a sufficient condition. But in both cases clear and compelling argument is a *necessary* condition, and it is important that – amid all the complex detail of individual issues – the larger picture always be kept in sight.

37. It is also important to continue to emphasize, in this larger debate, the crucial importance of the interconnection between the disarmament and non-proliferation agendas. The nuclear-armed states continue to insist that whereas non-proliferation is a shared global responsibility, disarmament is essentially their own business, to be conducted on their terms and in their own time. But if that attitude persists there is no question that it will be very much harder to get universal buy-in for really serious new non-proliferation measures. All the world hates a hypocrite, and for the nuclear-armed states to continue to insist that eve-

ryone else do as they say and not as they do, is not a recipe for reducing the terrible nuclear weapons risks the world continues to face.

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